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AN  
ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF  
HUGH BLAIR, D. D.

F. R. S. E.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH,  
AND PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND  
BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF  
EDINBURGH.

BY THE LATE  
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PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

PHYSICS 311

LECTURE 1

LECTURE 2

LECTURE 3

ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
LIFE AND WRITINGS  
OF  
*DR. HUGH BLAIR.*

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**B**IOGRAPHY, as a species of history, has advantages peculiar to itself. As venial defects may be thrown into the shade, the picture is beheld with more admiration than the original. While the striking features of a living character may be seen or reported, we are less anxious to collect them. As long as the circumstances in which his character is placed may vary, we feel ourselves at liberty to change our opinions,

and we fix unalterably the estimation that is due to him, only when he has retired from the scene of life.

From departed worth there is seldom any disposition to detract. Even the merit that was once doubtful is recognised as genuine; the outlines of a great character conceal its foibles; and the meanness of jealousy is ashamed to show itself.

The talents and virtues, which once commanded the admiration of the world, present a subject of inquiry that is no less useful than agreeable. What we are obliged to revere, we are ever prone to imitate. High as the standard may be by which others have regulated their conduct, the attainment of it is seen to be possible; and they who are accustomed to contemplate distinguished endowments in others, often foster such in themselves, without being conscious of doing so.

The author of this biographical dissertation knows well the difficulty of the task undertaken by him. From the singular

modesty of its amiable subject, every vestige of a correspondence, of which others would have been proud, has been destroyed, except a few letters respecting Ossian's Poems. Dr. Blair was of opinion, that in composing the lives of eminent men, an improper use had been made of the letters addressed to them; and he did not think it fair to turn such letters to a purpose, of which those who wrote them were not aware.

Many interesting anecdotes have thus perished, which the admirers of his character would have read with pleasure. His biographer laments the loss of such valuable materials; and, while he feels the honour of having been requested by his most intimate friend to transmit his name to posterity, he wishes this last duty had fallen upon one better qualified to discharge it.

The venerable Clergyman, whose life and character are now to be the subject of attention, was a lineal descendant of an an-

cient family in the west of Scotland; that of BLAIR of Blair. Abilities of a superior kind seem to have marked the family in general; and individuals of it have at different times taken the rank that was due to them in the departments of divinity, of law, and of physic. His great-grandfather, Mr. Robert Blair, was eminent in the clerical profession, in which Dr. Blair himself shone. As this Mr. Robert Blair was a clergyman of distinguished reputation, some preliminary observations respecting him may not be unacceptable. Great men spring often from men like themselves; and the talents and virtues that once adorned an illustrious ancestor, may be traced in the character even of remote descendants.

Mr. Robert Blair was born in the end of the sixteenth century, and was very early in life appointed a professor in the university of Glasgow. Feeling, however, a greater inclination to preach the gospel, than to teach philosophy, he obtained a license from the church. The merit of his sermons jus-

tified the expectations that had been formed of him, and they were often delivered to a crowded audience.

During the vacation of the college, he attended the celebrated Assembly held at Perth in the year 1618. He there witnessed the zeal of Spottiswood, Archbishop of St. Andrews, in behalf of prelacy, and of certain ceremonies before unknown in Scotland. In his own opinion, which was contrary to that of the Primate, he remained unshaken, and could neither be seduced by his artifices, nor intimidated by his threats. The friends of Mr. Blair however, were aware of the danger to which he exposed himself. Monsieur Basnage, then receiving contributions in Scotland for the French protestants, invited him to go to France, that he might avoid the vengeance of the offended bishops. This offer he rejected; and he declared publicly, with more zeal than prudence, that the superiority of a prelate over his diocese, of a primate over a kingdom, and of a pope over the church,



were, in his opinion, equally unauthorised by scripture.

In consequence of the part which Mr. Blair took in regard to the Perth Articles, which were ratified in 1621, his situation in the university of Glasgow soon became disagreeable. Law, the Archbishop of Glasgow, was rigorous in enforcing the Articles, and Cameron, the Principal of the university there, was active in seconding his views. The lectures of Mr. Blair being invidiously watched, and misconstrued, complaints were made of him to the king, which his majesty was pleased to disregard. He resolved, however, to give up an office in which he could be of little service to the public, and upon going over to Ireland, he was settled as a clergyman at Bangor.

This change of situation at the same time procured Mr. Blair but a short respite. The principles which he had espoused in Scotland made him odious to the Irish Episcopalians. He was dismissed from his charge at Bangor by Ecklin, Bishop of Doune,

and he found no redress from Usher the Primate. Urged by necessity, and encouraged by many, of whose wisdom and attachment he was fully convinced, he took the bold resolution of going to London, and of imploring in person the king's protection. He was there promised support by the Earl of Stirling, Secretary for Scotch affairs, but deceived by him. Far from being discouraged by a breach of promise, which dishonoured the nobleman that was guilty of it, he found his way to the king himself. His majesty heard the request with gracious condescension, and, by a missive in his own hand-writing, commanded the Earl of Strafford, then Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, to see him reinstated in his benefice.

In the year 1639, after having been some time a widower, Mr. Blair married Katharine, daughter of Hugh Montgomery, of Busby, in Ayrshire. As his situation in Ireland, even in spite of the king's interference, became daily more uncomfortable,

he determined to quit it. He set out with other clergymen, upon a voyage to New England, but was driven back by a storm. Soon afterwards he came to Scotland, with an intention to go abroad as chaplain to Colonel Hepburn's regiment, then in the French service. This intention, however, was not fulfilled, from the attachment of those who respected his talents, and felt for his misfortunes. Such was his popularity, that a number of matrons presented, in the streets of Edinburgh, an address to the Earl of Traquair, lord Treasurer, requesting of the council, that he and his persecuted brethren might be restored to their clerical functions. The request was granted, and Mr. Blair was soon after settled as minister at Ayr. There he was allowed to remain but a short time. By an act of assembly in 1639, he was ordered to transport himself to St. Andrews; and that he might submit the more cordially to the mandate, his friend, Mr. Samuel Ruther-

ford, was appointed professor of divinity there in St. Mary's College.

The character of Mr. Blair became more conspicuous, as the times in which he lived became more troublesome. After the defeat of Charles, who had burnt the articles of treaty with the Scots, this distinguished clergyman was appointed by the committee of estates to assist the commissioners for ratifying the treaty at Rippon, in 1640. Two years after, he was sent to Ireland by the General Assembly, to settle probationers in the room of those Protestant clergymen who were massacred during the rebellion among the Papists. He was, by the same authority, appointed in 1643 one of the committee who met John, Earl of Rutland, and four other English commissioners, to ratify the Solemn League and Covenant which was to be binding on the two countries. He accompanied the army raised by the convention of estates, to assist that of the Parliament of England then at war with the king, and remained with it as

chaplain to Lord Crawford's regiment till after the victory obtained at Marston-moor.

When Charles escaped from his own army, and put himself under the protection of the Scots, Mr. Blair was sent with other commissioners to meet the King at Newcastle. They there tried to reconcile his majesty to presbyterian government, and to the observance of the covenants. Though the object in view was not obtained, yet Mr. Blair acted with so much address and discretion, as to recommend himself to his majesty's favour. Of this he received a flattering proof, by being named sole chaplain for Scotland without soliciting the office.

When Cromwell came to Edinburgh, Mr. Blair and two other clergymen were appointed to wait upon him, to request that he would promote uniformity between the churches of England and Scotland. During the interview, he saw with his usual penetration the character of the Protector,



and the motives by which his conduct was influenced. To these, one of his brethren Mr. James Sharp, afterwards Archbishop of St. Andrews, was blind; and expressed his satisfaction with Cromwell's condescension. Mr. Blair regardless of every consequence, at once exposed the mistake, and declared him "to be an egregious dissembler, and a great liar."

Mr. Blair being in London during the time of King Charles's trial, his majesty expressed a strong desire to converse with him, which privilege was denied. Nothing could ever reconcile this spirited man to the dominion of the Protector. He saw with indignation the arts by which this usurper crept into power, and dreaded the consequences to which they might then lead. He zealously opposed sending a deputation from the church to solicit his favour. He was aware of Sharp's disposition to betray the trust committed to him, and had early information that he had done so. He afterwards shewed himself regardless of

the power of a Primate, whom he could not respect. The vindictive spirit of the Archbishop soon drove him from St. Andrews, and he ended a life of uncommon usefulness and activity, in the parish of Aberdour, in the seventy-third year of his age.

This distinguished clergyman, whose character seems entitled to the notice that has been taken of it, left behind him two sons, David and Hugh. David was minister of the Old Church in Edinburgh, and father of Mr. Robert Blair, minister at Athelstoneford, and of Mr. Archibald Blair, minister at Garvald, both in East Lothian. The former of these was author of the beautiful poem entitled "The Grave," and father of Robert Blair, Esq. advocate, for many years his majesty's solicitor-general for Scotland, whose high professional abilities have long done honour to his country. The latter was father to Dr. Robert Blair, Professor of practical astronomy in the university of Edinburgh, whose learning and ingenuity have been universally acknowledged.



From Hugh, the younger son of Robert sprung John, who was a respectable merchant, and one of the magistrates of Edinburgh. As his fortune suffered considerably from being engaged in the South Sea scheme, he obtained an office in the excise. He married Martha Ogston, and the first child of this marriage was the celebrated Hugh Blair, the subject of the present memoir, who was born on the 7th of April, 1718.

Though the fortune of Mr. John Blair had suffered, yet it was not so much impaired as to prevent him from giving his son a liberal education. He had early perceived in him marks of latent genius, and he resolved to bestow that polish upon the gem, which would in the end display its value. The industry of the young man was sharpened by a sense of his situation. He soon saw, that in proportion to the exertions at the beginning, would be his success during the career of life.

After going through the usual course at the High School, he became a student at

the university of Edinburgh in October 1730. Though beloved by the boys with whom he was educated, yet from the feebleness of his constitution, he was not able to partake much in their sports. He preferred amusing himself at his solitary walks, with repeating the poems of others, and sometimes attempting to make poems of his own.

When he became a student at the university, his constitution grew more vigorous, and he could pursue both the amusements and the studies that belonged to his time of life. He was taught humanity or philology under Professor Adam Watt, Greek under Professor Colin Drummond, and logic under Professor John Stevenson. In all his classes he attracted attention, but in the logic class he was particularly distinguished. While attending this class, he composed an essay, *περι τῆς καλῆς* that is, upon the *Beautiful*, in which the bent of his genius first displayed itself both to himself and to others. With a power of discri-

mination, and a correctness of feeling, beyond what could have been expected from a youth of but sixteen years of age, he marked the general characters of beauty as residing in the different objects of taste.

The merit of this essay was evinced by the most flattering marks of the professor's approbation. He ordered it to be read publicly at the end of the session during which it was composed, and he considered it as a performance that did credit to himself, as well as to his pupil.

In the year 1739, when the course of Mr. Blair's academical studies was nearly finished, he published a thesis, "*De fundamentis et obligatione Legis Naturæ.*" This he did with a view to become entitled to the degree of master of arts. The discussion, though short, as was required, is able. It contains the substance of what is said upon that important subject by ancient and modern philosophers, and exposes the sullen system of Hobbes, as inconsistent not only with the happiness, but even with the ex-

istence of society. The language also is spirited and elegant. A few errors may perhaps be detected in it by those who have studied the Latin language critically, but they will escape the notice even of respectable proficient. In the moral doctrine of this essay may be seen the first dawnings of that virtuous sensibility in its author, by which the world was afterwards to profit in his sermons.

After spending eleven years at the university, in the study of literature, philosophy, and divinity, Mr. Blair was licensed to preach the Gospel by the presbytery of Edinburgh on the 21st of October, 1741. His first appearances in the pulpit justified the expectations which his friends had formed of him. His doctrines were sound and practical, and his language, though somewhat flowery, presented none of that false glare, which while it pleases a vulgar, always offends a judicious eye. Its early luxuriance soon corrected itself, and was understood by his friends to announce the value of the crop,

when the fruits of his genius should be matured by time.

The fame of the young preacher was not confined to the city within which his sermons were generally delivered. One sermon of his, in the West Church, was particularly noticed. It arrested the attention of a very numerous congregation, and spoke to the feelings of many hearers, whose objects of pursuit, and whose portions of understanding, were extremely different. The form of religious truth assumed its prerogative; it inflamed the ardour of the pious, and settled the doubts of the wavering.

The Earl of Leven, hearing of the merit of this sermon, was desirous to reward the preacher by procuring him a presentation to the church of Colessie in Fifeshire, which was vacant at that time. Upon the 23d of September 1742, accordingly, Mr. Blair was ordained minister of Colessie, in the presbytery of Cupar. There he continued nearly ten months; when those talents which might have languished in the obscurity of a



country parish, were brought into a sphere, in which they became conspicuous, and extensively useful.

In consequence of a vacancy in the Canongate of Edinburgh, his friends were enabled to restore him to the neighbourhood of his native city. Here he was admitted second minister upon the 14th of July, 1743. In order to accomplish this settlement, no small efforts were required, as the second charge of the Canongate is supplied by popular election, and his competitor, Mr. Robert Walker, then in high estimation as a preacher, was powerfully supported in the canvass. By the most active exertions, however, out of two hundred and eighteen votes, Mr. Blair obtained one hundred and thirty-six. During the eleven years that he continued minister of the Canongate, his reputation as a preacher was continually growing. The gay and the serious, the opulent and the needy, the learned and the illiterate, vied with each other in eagerness to profit by those instructions, which were

alike useful, and which the art of the preacher rendered alike agreeable to them all. By the elegance of his compositions, the taste of the critic was gratified, and by their piety, the faith of the Christian was confirmed. He made the precepts of religion to reach the heart by a channel, in which their course was not to be resisted. When such sentiments gained admission by his eloquence into breasts, in which they were strangers, they assumed their native authority: and they made even the ungodly feel and confess their influence.

It was not, however, to be supposed, that such professional merit as Mr. Blair's could stop at any point in the line of his preferment but the highest. In the immediate neighbourhood of the metropolis his pretensions could not lie concealed. He was translated from the Canongate to that church in the city of Edinburgh which is called Lady Yester's, on the 11th of October, 1754, and from thence to the High Church, on the 15th of June, 1758.



When a Scottish clergyman reaches the station last mentioned, the career of his professional ambition is understood to be over. It is then his province to preach before the judges of the land, and to instruct the most learned and respectable audience which his country can present. Mr. Blair's talents for pulpit eloquence could now display themselves to advantage. Every thing tended to fire that laudable ambition, which even in him gave confidence to modesty, and which led him on to that eminence which he so justly deserved.

The terms of the Act of Council, upon which he was translated by the Presbytery of Edinburgh to the High Church, are honourable to the presentee. It is recorded, that this measure was adopted, "because the Council had it fully ascertained, that his translation would be highly acceptable to persons of the most distinguished character and eminent rank in this country, who had their seats in said church." Had he been of a political and an ambitious dis-

position, we should have given him credit for his sagacity, and for his skill in intrigue. His innate modesty we should have construed into refined address, and have applauded that wisdom, which made him forbear to solicit the attention of the world, till he could for certain command its respect. Few men, however, were ever less disposed to force themselves upon the notice of the public. When its honours came upon him, he felt their value; but, had these been withheld, a mind happily superior to jealousy and arrogance would have armed him against the pain of discontent. His friends were accordingly more active than himself in devising plans for bringing him into notice.

During the four years that Mr. Blair was minister of Lady Yester's, several events occurred in his life too important to be omitted. Though he was disposed by his natural temper, and even obliged by the narrowness of his circumstances, to shun the company of his superiors in fortune, yet

his abilities were known and respected by them all. His fame as a preacher was by this time established, but his talents in the way of critical learning were known only to his personal friends. Fortunately for literature in those times, no illiberal jealousy disgraced its votaries. No literary combinations then existed in this country, nor was the critic's candour ever seen to be influenced by the principles of his party either in science or politics. That honest emulation which prompted each to excel, led him to disdain to injure the man whom in his own department he could not eclipse, and to feel more satisfaction in sharing literary honours with a deserving rival, than in seizing them with a selfish avidity.

The stock of literature which then adorned the country, was the pride of the different scholars who collected it, and the mutual generosity of their sentiments gave a lustre to their literary acquisitions, which nothing else could impart. To the manly liberality of Dr. Blair's intimate and learned friends,

the world stands indebted for his services as a scholar. By presenting attractions of which he was hardly aware, they drew him from the retirement to which he seemed attached; and they led him almost involuntarily to assume a place in the republic of letters, suited to that merit of which he seemed unconscious.

In spite of every attempt upon his part to decline literary honours, they were heaped upon him with profusion. In June 1757 the university of St. Andrews showed its discernment, by presenting him with the degree of Doctor in Divinity; and as this academical honour was then hardly known in Scotland, it was the more creditable for those who attained it. The town-council of Edinburgh, in August 1760, instituted in the university there a Professorship of Rhetoric, to which they elected and appointed Dr. Blair. The merit of the presentee, and his fitness for the office, had been proved by a set of lectures which he delivered the preceding winter. In April 1762 his

majesty was graciously pleased to give an early proof of that royal munificence, with which he has always distinguished the university of Edinburgh, by erecting and endowing a Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, and appointing Dr. Blair professor, with a salary of £.70.

The manner in which the learned Doctor acquired his different offices, it should seem was in the highest degree flattering to himself. Blessed with a mind superior to those artifices, by which the undeserving often attain eminence, personal merit alone procured him the best field for the display of his powers. The most learned audience of this country were the weekly judges of his pulpit eloquence, in which any thing spurious would have been detected and condemned. From a professor holding a new establishment in an university which had much reputation to boast of, no ordinary performances were expected; and high was the responsibility imposed upon that learned man, to whom the task of forming the taste



of the rising generation was thus formally consigned. The excellencies and the defects of his character might then become alike conspicuous, and the public could judge unerringly with what justice it had loaded him with its honours.

Let us examine its discernment, by viewing Dr. Blair in three distinct characters ; as a *Critic*, as a *Preacher*, and as a *Man*.

In the year 1755, the expectations of the public, from the abilities of a certain set of literary men, were about to be realised. Mr. Wedderburn, afterwards Earl of Rosslyn, Dr. Robertson, Dr. Smith, and Dr. Blair, had given room even to ordinary observers to prognosticate their future eminence in their respective lines. With a generous view to improve literature in Scotland, where, though it had begun to dawn, it was but little advanced, those learned friends had a principal hand in publishing a periodical work, entitled, “The Edinburgh Review.”

Of this paper two numbers only appeared, the first at the commencement of the year above mentioned, and the last six months after. In the first of these, an ingenious piece of criticism appears upon Johnson's Dictionary, in which it is said that the Earl of Rosslyn and Dr. Smith were jointly concerned. Some of the admirers of Johnson have complained, that the reviewers have hardly done justice to his merit, and that they have held him forth as an industrious rather than as an acute philologist. This charge against them does not seem well founded. Though the author's plan is not deemed unexceptionable, yet, in suggesting improvements upon it, no unbecoming asperity of language is employed by his critics. Far from wishing to detract from the merit of the work, they wish to add to that which they allow it to possess. While they regret that sufficient care had not been taken to distinguish words apparently synonymous, they allow the high uti-



lity of the Dictionary, and recommend it to be used by all those who are desirous to correct and to improve their language.

In order to make their ideas more intelligible, those ingenious critics have stated at full length Dr. Johnson's observations upon the conjunction *But*, and the substantive *Humour*, and have afterwards given a specimen of their own grammatical discernment, by first fixing the radical power of each of the terms, and then marking how all the secondary meanings spring from the radical. Their logical deductions, as may be expected, are equally subtle and correct; but such could not be formed quickly even by superior minds, nor applied to all the words in the English language during the life of a single man. Comparing the merit of Dr. Johnson's work with the time in which it was executed, they applaud the author's industry, and they state strongly his claim to public approbation.

The same liberal spirit does not appear to have belonged to all the members of this

literary association. Some of them seem to assume the privilege of regulating the public taste, and exercise that privilege with a dictatorial rigour, which could never improve it. Forgetting the narrowness of the country in which they wrote, and the disgust to be expected under reproofs sometimes groundless and often too severe, they discouraged those literary efforts which they professed to foster. Ignorant of that great principle in the art of teaching, that the pupil should never be allowed to despise himself, they either checked the ardour of young authors, or roused their indignation.

This severity of criticism was chiefly exercised upon a History of Cræsus, King of Lydia ; upon Harvey's Theron and Aspasio ; and upon Sermons by Mr. Boston at Oxnam, Mr. Ebenezer Erskine at Stirling, and Mr. Johnston at Moffat. All these authors, except the last, either despised the rude attack, or bore it with patience. Mr. Johnston, however, winced under a sense

of its injustice, and in a pamphlet entitled, “A View of the Edinburgh Review, pointing out the spirit and tendency of that Paper,” convinced many that the biter had been biting himself:—

*Fragili quærens illidere dentem,  
Offendit solido.*

In the discharge of the duties of this conjunct undertaking, it fell upon Dr. Blair to review Dr. Hutcheson’s “System of Moral Philosophy.” This accident appears to have been alike fortunate for the author and his critic. The former presented a subject interesting in itself, and ably canvassed, while the latter possessed talents adequate to the task assigned him, which would catch every latent beauty and defect, and scrupulously measure the extent of each.

In the review given by Dr. Blair of this interesting work, the reader’s attention is not withdrawn from its proper object. No vague and tedious dissertation is presented,

by which the critic can mean nothing but to set off himself. He supposes his reader unacquainted with the book, and himself called upon to give him a view of its contents. By no dogmatical decision does he pretend to rob him of the privilege of judging for himself; and while with a becoming spirit he declares his own opinions, he is superior to the petulance of wishing to obtrude them upon others.

From perusing this criticism, accordingly, a perfect notion may be formed of its subject. As the difference between Dr. Hutcheson's system, and the systems of those who found moral approbation upon reason, upon sympathy, upon truth, and upon self-love, is clear, no time is spent in stating it. The apparent and the real similarity between Dr. Hutcheson's and Lord Shaftsbury's systems, however, require investigation, and in marking the difference, the critic displays his acuteness. Though benevolence is the leading principle in each, yet that in the noble author's is found less disinterested

than in the other, and sentiments, seemingly generous in the former, are shown to be ultimately selfish.

While Dr. Blair does all justice, on the one hand, to the merits of the system he is examining, he fails not, on the other, to point out its defects. Though gentle, he is impartial. He exposes the inaccuracy of confounding actions that arise from a sense of duty, with those arising from a simple approbation of the moral sense. Many admirers, for instance, of the benevolent heroism of the Decii, who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their country, feel no inclination to imitate their conduct from a sense of duty. The system of Dr. Hutcheson, with all its excellence, is regarded as somewhat ideal, and as calculated to please in theory, rather than to assist in practice. Virtue is held forth in it as an object which we must admire and approve, rather than as a law for regulating our conduct. Its tendency seems to be, to make virtuous men



better, not to teach the bulk of mankind the first principles of duty.

Soon after Dr. Blair was translated to the High Church, he had an opportunity of displaying his critical powers in a Dissertation upon the Poems of Ossian. Fragments of Gaelic poetry had been communicated to Mr. Home, the author of "Douglas," by Mr. James Macpherson, then a student in divinity from the Highlands. The merits of those fragments surprised many of the literari of Edinburgh. Anxious to add to their number, and to allow none of the remains of Gaelic literature to perish, they encouraged a subscription for enabling Mr. Macpherson to traverse the Highlands in quest of them. All that he collected he translated and published. In spite of the acknowledged taste and judgment of the admirers of these poems, their merit and their authenticity were soon questioned; and many Scottish critics found themselves called upon to defend points in



which they supposed the honour of their country to be concerned.

In this controversy, Dr. Blair took an early and a conspicuous part. He laboured not only to evince the beauty of the poems themselves, but to remove the imputation of their being literary forgeries. Of those, however, who attended to the subject, a greater number was disposed to agree with him as to the excellence of these compositions, than as to their authenticity.

With regard to what has been urged against these poems, the bounds which must be observed in a work of this kind, do not permit us to weigh the objections in a manner that might enable us to estimate their full force. Those, who almost deny that Ossian has merit of any kind, give a melancholy proof of incapacity to judge. As certainly as the principle of taste exists in the mind of man, the poems of Ossian must often command the admiration of those who possess it. Though the limited information of the bard, in rude times, gave

him little variety in the subjects of his figures, yet this circumstance did not blunt the sensibility of his heart. The little he saw, he saw correctly; and he was feelingly alive to every virtuous and heroic impression. Though squeamish judges magnify trifles, and often censure without cause, yet in those poems there are splendid beauties, which the virulence of criticism dares not to attack.

In proof of what is now said, two only of many striking passages shall be produced. Both are taken from the poem entitled *Lathmon*; and the first will admit of a comparison with a similar passage in Homer. In the passages from both poets, high parental affection is the foundation of the beauty, and both may have suffered alike from being translated. The last interview between Hector and Andromache, near the end of the Sixth Book of the *Iliad*, is wrought up with a degree of art, that does honour even to the genius of Homer. The armed warrior is held forth

as taking his child into his bosom, and praying, in behalf of him, in the following emphatic words:—

Ζεῦ, ἄλλοι τε θεοὶ, δότε δὴ καὶ τόνδε γενέσθαι  
 Παιῖδ' ἐμὸν, ὡς ἐγὼ περ, ἀριπρεπία Τρώεσσι,  
 ὦνδε βίην τ' ἀγαθὸν, καὶ Ἴλις ἔφι ἀνάσσειν·  
 Καὶ ποτὲ τις εἴπησιν, Πατὴρ δ' ὄγε πολλὸν ἀμείναν.  
 Ἐκ πολέμου ἀνιόντω·—ΙΛΙΑΔ. β. 476.

“O Jupiter, and you other Gods! grant that this son of mine may become, as I am, distinguished among the Trojans; that he may be alike powerful in strength; and that he may rule over Ilium with an irresistible sway: And may some person hereafter say of him when returning from battle, This man, indeed, is much braver than his father.”

When the aged warrior Morni anxiously anticipates the fame of his son in that art, in which he had been distinguished himself, he uses the following words:—“I have a son, O Fingal! His soul has delighted in Morni’s deeds; but his sword has not been

lifted up against a foe, neither has his fame begun. I come with him to war, to direct his arm in fight. His renown will be a light to my soul in the dark hour of my departure. O that the name of Morni were forgotten among the people! that the heroes would only say, BEHOLD THE FATHER OF GAUL."

Here the Celtic Bard not only stands a comparison with the Grecian, when their subjects are the same, but carries off the palm. There is not in the prayer of Hector, the same high generosity as in that of Morni. Glowing as the Trojan warrior's attachment is, he does not forget himself; but he first prays, that his son may be his equal in eminence among the Trojans, and then only his superior in military renown. The ardour of Morni's parental affection, again, leads him to renounce every thing personal. His own lustre in arms he is willing to sacrifice to the fame of his son. Between his love to him, and his love to

military glory, there is a struggle, in which the former decidedly prevails. He prays, that his own exploits may be buried in oblivion, upon the single condition, to which his high mind could submit; and, with exquisite delicacy, wishes to live in the remembrance of posterity, only as the father of Gaul.

This young hero soon shews himself worthy of such a father, when he and Ossian, who speaks in the following passage, approached the sleeping foe:—"We came to the bank of the stream, and saw the sleeping host. Their fires were decayed on the plain: the lonely steps of their scouts were distant far. I stretched my spear before me, to support my steps over the stream. But Gaul took my hand, and spoke the words of the brave. Shall the son of Fingal rush on the sleeping foe? Shall he come like a blast by night, when it overturns the young trees in secret? Fingal did not thus receive his fame, nor dwells renown on the grey hairs of Morni for actions like these.



Strike, Ossian, strike the shield, and let their thousands rise! Let them meet Gaul in his first battle, that he may try the strength of his arm." A sentiment of more dignified magnanimity is not to be met with in any poet. If the maxims of modern warfare were repugnant to this, they would be at variance with the finest feelings of the human heart. The classics of Greece and of Rome present nothing more noble; and were we to search those classics for a passage to contrast with that now quoted, we might perhaps search in vain.

Whatever doubts arose formerly, either as to the authenticity, or the beauty, of the Poems of Ossian, none were ever heard of as to the merit, of the Dissertation, in which both were vindicated.

The talents of its author were admired even by those, whom they did not convince. Supposing the value of the Poems to have been overrated, yet the canon by which that value was tried, was scrupulously correct. The critic of Ossian did not



gaze upon the beauties of his author with senseless admiration, “*ut pueri Junonis avem,*” but marked the circumstance which gave existence to each. He discovered equal sensibility to the magnanimity of the hero, and to the tenderness of the parent. He traced the line of poetic description with an accuracy before unexampled, and made it rest on the judicious selection of a few of the characteristic circumstances in the object described. The eccentric play of Ossian’s genius was brought to that genuine standard, to which every poet in every age must submit; and those varied beauties, which of old struck the untutored taste of the Northern tribes, were referred to certain great principles in human nature, which time cannot change.

Bold as the attempt was, it soon appeared to those, on whom nature has conferred a quick sensibility to beauty, that the powers of the critic were completely equal to it. By means of the ingenuity displayed in an Essay, which combined the subtlety

of Aristotle with the elegance of Longinus, a new æra was established in literature. From an able development of the laws of one species of poetry, inferences were deduced, which applied, in a certain degree, to every other. Polite literature was found entitled to take its place among the sciences. In the decisions of taste, whether gratified or otherwise, one principle was found uniformly to operate. As certainly as beauty exists, it was proved, that it has its own laws, and that the capriciousness, falsely ascribed to taste, arises from nothing but an hasty, and of course an illegitimate induction, by those who canvass its subjects.

The fame of this elegant and ingenious criticism was not confined to the country that gave birth to its author. In judging of the ability of the critic, the public did not wait to ascertain either the authenticity of his subject, or the extent of its merit. Men of taste were pleased with the discovery of a fixed principle for regulating their

decisions, in whatever way it had been made. They deemed it no small accession to the stores of literature, and found themselves furnished with a new standard, to which the productions of poetical genius might be safely referred.

For the space of eighteen years after Dr. Blair began to read Lectures upon Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, he found full room for the exercise of his powers. His reputation as a preacher was then so high, that no ordinary exertion was sufficient to support it. Of this he seems to have been aware. In no instance was he ever disposed to take credit for past acquirements, but shewed himself unwilling to forego that approbation, which the public had bestowed liberally, and of which he felt the value. In discharging the duties both of a Clergyman and of a Professor, he exhibited a meritorious zeal; and from his uncommon industry, the labours of his pulpit never interfered with those of his academical chair.

In collecting materials for his Lectures, he found a field before him that was extensive, and, in this country, almost untrodden. Though British genius had displayed itself in different departments of literature, yet the principles of taste were not so correctly ascertained, as to form a rule for judging of its exertions. Dr. Smith was the first person who read Lectures in Edinburgh upon Rhetoric; and in this branch of science shewed the same original talents that distinguished him in others. When he went to Glasgow as Professor of Logic, Lectures upon the same subject were read by Dr. Watson, who afterwards became Professor of that Science at St. Andrews. Lord Kames published his Elements of Criticism after Dr. Blair had begun to read Lectures privately, and before his Majesty erected and endowed his establishment in the University of Edinburgh.

After reading his course of Lectures in the University above twenty years, Dr. Blair

found it proper to publish them in 1783. He tells us in his preface, that their publication then was not altogether a matter of choice. Imperfect copies, in manuscript, had been exposed to sale, and from them quotations had appeared in the *Biographia Britannica*. It became necessary, accordingly, that the Lectures should proceed from his own hand, rather than come into public view under some very defective and erroneous form.

It must be apparent to every attentive reader, that Dr. Blair was much more anxious to compose Lectures that might become distinguished for their utility, than for their depth. His object was to initiate youth into a study, with which the country at large was but little acquainted. His pupils had undergone no preparatory discipline in the science, to which they applied themselves. Subtle discussions from their teacher would have been, in a certain degree, misapplied, and the stability of the



structure might have been impaired, had the foundation not been securely laid.

As the author of those Lectures did not pique himself upon their depth, so neither did he boast of their originality. Upon every subject treated of, he tells us that he had thought for himself, but that he availed himself occasionally of the ideas of others. He felt it his duty to convey to his pupils all the knowledge that could improve them. By borrowing from others, he understood, that he not only enlarged the mass, but gave a value to the parts of it, of which they might otherwise have been destitute.

But whatever reason Dr. Blair might see to accommodate his Lectures to the capacity of young men, who were novices in his science, it has been urged by some, that he carried his desire of doing so too far. No great effort, they tell us, is requisite to apprehend principles legitimately formed, and clearly stated. If a teacher establish no principles, he trifles with those whom



he pretends to instruct. He refuses to satisfy the appetite which he raises, and genius must languish for want of its proper food. Though superficial thinkers decry metaphysical discussion, because they dread its effects, yet nothing is so bad as the total want of it. It exposes the falsehood of those theories which exist in the imagination of the petulant, and it evolves the truth, by a nice discrimination of facts, which pretenders in science have neither discernment nor industry to collect.

With all the merit which Dr. Blair's Lectures possess, it must be allowed, that the objection mentioned is in some degree applicable to them. By being too modest, or too timid, he rarely has the boldness to hazard a general remark. What many have said, and almost all believe, he states with confidence; and, by an unfortunate distrust of his own powers, he is apt to excite doubts in others, by betraying them in himself. He, who makes his pupils exercise their own talents, does them a real service; and it is

better, perhaps, to establish principles that are questionable, than to establish none.

In respect to the vigour and the correctness of the principle of taste, Dr. Blair had few rivals, and no superiors. In him this power was feelingly alive to the slightest impulse, and it separated the spurious from the genuine with unerring delicacy. Lord Kames, who had studied the subject of *Belles Lettres* before the Doctor was known to have done so, and who was the first in this country that attempted to reduce it to a system, does not catch beauties and defects with the same nice apprehension. In point of originality, at the same time, and of that inventive power, which traces and establishes principles in the science, his Lordship is much superior. Some of his theories may perhaps be false, and others whimsical; but in all of them there is ingenuity, and in many of them much truth. Whatever advantage the former critic had in the delicate precision of his taste, the latter seems to have possessed in the force

of his genius. By every scientific inquirer, accordingly, the Elements of Criticism must be regarded as a valuable mine, that will not soon be exhausted.

After the publication of Lord Kames's Elements of Criticism, and before that of Dr. Blair's Lectures, Dr. Campbell of Aberdeen produced his Philosophy of Rhetoric. This work, consisting of a number of essays, which may be viewed either separately, or as forming one whole, is less systematic than those that went before it. Its author, with that modesty which is often the attendant of genius, undertakes less than he shews himself able to do. It is clear, at the same time, that he had read much, and thought deeply, upon his subject, and that his mind, naturally acute and sagacious, throws light upon any thing to which he chose to direct it. Along with delicate feeling, he discovers high metaphysical power; and his ingenious and original disquisitions will probably rise in estimation, as men become more able to follow them.

In the first part of Dr. Blair's Lectures, where he analyses the power of taste, and states the different sources of its pleasures, we meet with many sound and interesting observations. While handling such subjects, he derived advantages from nature, which she had denied to many. With every avenue to knowledge possessed by others, in viewing the different species of beauty, and marking their effects upon those around him, he enjoyed a privilege peculiar to himself. He had only to look into his own mind, in order to catch the general law, which operates upon that of others, and could thus delineate the power, so as to suit the diversities in which mankind exhibit it. While he denies that it is an arbitrary principle, to which no criterion is applicable, he talks of no appeal to the judgment of one, or a few, for ascertaining beauty in the works of nature and of art. The genuine taste of the human species is made to rest on what, in all ages and countries, has given it the highest and the most

extensive delight. In matters of feeling, as well as of intellect, established laws are said to prevail, and the difference between beauty and deformity to be, in fact, as immutable, as that between truth and falsehood.

The same difference is made to exist between the sublime and the beautiful, by Dr. Blair, as by other writers on the subject. To the term sublimity two meanings are affixed; that is, it denotes both the emotion excited in the mind, and the quality in the object that excites it. Beauty, again, is confined to the object, without any regard to the emotion. The feelings raised by each, seem to be too nearly a-kin to be separated, as they generally are. If an object, in itself beautiful, be rendered great, it becomes sublime. Agreeableness is the genus, of which beauty and sublimity are the species; and, though the former may exist by itself, yet, where there is the least deformity, the latter is extinguished. Dr. Blair mentions several theories, which have



been given by different authors, as to the origin of those emotions styled sublime. He states that of Mr. Burke, with the respect due to the force and originality of his genius. Though he allows it to be ingenious, yet he doubts if it is solid; while, at the same time, he proposes nothing, with any confidence, to be substituted in its place.

In the second part of Dr. Blair's Lectures, which treats of the structure of language, his timidity, as a philosophical inquirer, is more apparent than any where. Of the importance and the difficulty of the subject, he seems to have been completely aware. Few authors, he tells us, have treated this science, in which a deep and refined logic is employed, with the accuracy it deserves. He regrets, that superficial thinkers slight it, as belonging to those rudiments of knowledge, which were inculcated upon us in our earliest youth; and he attributes to the ignorance of it, many



of those fundamental defects which appear in writing.

From these preliminary observations, it was to have been expected, that, in establishing a theory of speech, former errors would have been exploded, and the utmost accuracy introduced. Every attempt, however, to expose and to amend what is faulty, is declined. The common division of speech into eight parts, is condemned as illogical, which it undoubtedly is. We are told, at the same time, that, as the old terms are those to which our ears have been most familiarised, and as an exact logical division is of no great consequence to the present purpose, it is better to make use of those known terms than of any other.

When a system, seen to be erroneous, is voluntarily embraced, nothing luminous is to be expected. The slightest error at the outset must affect every step in the progress; and though, in certain cases, the conclusions be not the same with those of

former inquirers, they must be alike unprofitable.

The third part of Dr. Blair's Lectures, which relates to style, is by much the most useful of the whole work. In this, the author discovers high critical ability; and is fortunate in explaining his rules, by applying them to passages in writers of distinguished eminence. A laudable zeal is seen upon the part of the teacher to communicate useful instruction; and he is wonderfully successful, in giving to each of his Lectures, upon the subject of Style, almost every excellence that can belong to a didactic discourse. All ornament in the language seems to be studiously avoided. Nothing drops from the pen of the author, which might divert the reader's attention from its proper object. Perspicuity alone is courted; and by so great a master in the art of writing, it is completely attained.

In this part of the course, three Lectures are set apart for giving rules with regard to the construction of sentences. Aristotle's

definition of a sentence is considered as a good one:—"A form of speech having a beginning and an end within itself, and of such a length, as to be easily comprehended." Sentences are viewed in respect to their clearness, their unity, their strength, and their harmony. Instances from authors of note are produced, in some of which these qualities are shewn to be conspicuous, and in others to be deficient. The learned critic does not degrade his talents, by uttering any thing that is scurrilous, or illiberal. Knowing the difficulty of the art which he professed, he makes every allowance for those who occasionally fail in it. With a taste that could measure scrupulously every beauty and every defect, he is always more disposed to praise than to censure; and in correcting slips which he felt strongly, he discovers the most amiable candour.

Under the article of Style, Dr. Blair treats of the origin and nature of the figures of rhetoric. Here a fine field is presented for

the display of his taste ; of the strength of which, in spite of his modesty, he seems luckily conscious. In selecting instances, with a view to explain the nature of Metaphor, Hyperbole, Prosopopeia, Apostrophe, and other figures of speech, we have equal reason to admire his industry and his judgment. As soon as he apprehended the existence, he marked the cause of every beauty and defect. His feeling, in regard to both, was correct, as well as strong ; and the delicate instinct, which led to the immediate perception of each, was accompanied with an exercise of judgment, which measured its precise extent.

Though many curious observations are made by Dr. Blair, Lord Kames, and Dr. Campbell, upon the Philosophy of Rhetorical Figures, yet the subject is by no means exhausted. Much ingenuity may yet be shewn in tracing the principle upon which they respectively operate, and in marking the boundaries by which they are distinguished. It was no small loss to the lite-



rary world, that Dr. Smith ordered his manuscripts on the subject to be destroyed, because they appeared to himself to be in some degree imperfect. Theories by a mind like his, though incomplete, must have thrown light upon their subject, and suggested hints, which others might have pursued. It was alleged by him and his friends, that Dr. Blair had availed himself largely of his remarks, both on the construction of sentences, and on the general characters of style. In this case, however, there was no plagiarism. Dr. Blair tells us in a note, that several ideas upon these subjects had been taken from a manuscript treatise on Rhetoric shewn him by the learned and ingenious author Dr. Adam Smith; and which, it was hoped, would be given by him to the public. It is the wish of a plagiarist to shine in borrowed feathers, which Dr. Blair disdained. He avowed his obligation to his learned friend; and understood when he did so, that the public would have it in their power to judge of its extent.



The laudable anxiety of Dr. Blair to give every possible instruction, with regard to style, is further visible in a critical examination of four papers in the Spectator, and of a passage in the writings of Dean Swift. In the five Lectures containing this, every rule formerly given is turned to immediate use. Whatever may have been obscure in theory is rendered clear in practice, and every student feels himself furnished with a canon for judging of the style of others, and for regulating his own.

After finishing what relates to style, Dr. Blair ascends a step higher, and examines the subjects on which style is employed. He treats of eloquence, or the different kinds of public speaking, as exhibited in popular assemblies, at the bar, and in the pulpit. He defines eloquence with great precision, and exposes the mistaken notions which men entertain with regard to it. He compares the state of the art in ancient and modern times, and the merits of two illustrious orators, Demosthenes and Cicero.

In comparing orators, whose practice was the standard of excellence in their respective countries, much critical ability is displayed. From the merit of Cicero, there seems to be no disposition to detract. His powers of embellishing his subject, and of prejudicing his hearers in his favour, are spoken of as they deserve. For the discernment of those French critics, who give him the preference to his rival, all respect is shewn; though in this opinion Dr. Blair refuses to acquiesce. He agrees with Mr. Hume, who, in his Essay upon Eloquence, declares, that, of all human productions, the orations of Demosthenes approach the nearest to perfection. He complains, that the art of the Roman orator is, on all occasions, too obvious; and that, in the midst of high sentiments of patriotism, his hearer is often disturbed with some trifling attention to himself. He quotes Fenelon, as expressing sentiments that coincide with his own:—

*“ Je ne crains pas dire que Demosthene me paroît superieur a Ciceron, Je proteste que*

*personne n'admire plus Ciceron que je fais. Il embellit tout ce qu'il touche. Il fait honneur a la parole. Il fait des mots ce qu'un autre n'en sauroit faire. Il a, je ne sais combien de sortes d'esprits. Il est meme court et vehement, toutes les fois qu'il veut l'etre; contre Catiline, contre Verres, contre Antoine. Mais on remarque quelque parure dans son discours. L'art y est merveilleux; mais on l'entrevoit. L'orateur en pensant au salut de la république ne s'oublie pas, et ne se laisse pas oublier."*

The rhetorical powers of Demosthenes are held forth, as being of a higher order than those of Cicero, and also as being different in kind. Of the former, vigour and austerity are made the characteristics; and of the latter, gentleness and insinuation. The simplicity of the style of Demosthenes is said to suit the energy of his thoughts. No studied ornament in the one interrupts the rapid course of the other. Bold as his figures often are, they appear the fruit of no effort; and the precise train of conceptions that

existed in the mind of the orator is transfused into his audience with inimitable art. Dr. Blair appeals again to the elegant and correct taste of the Archbishop of Cambray:—“ *Demosthene paroît sortir de soi, et ne voir que la patrie. Il ne cherche point le beau; il le fait, sans y penser. Il est au dessus de l’ admiration. Il se sert de la parole comme un homme modeste de son habit, pour se couvrir. Il tonne; il foudroye. C’est un torrent qui entraîne tout. On ne peut le critiquer, parcequ’ on est saisi. On pense aux choses qu’il dit, et non a ses paroles. On le perde de vue. On n’est occupé que de Philippe, qui envahit tout. Je suis charmé, de ces deux orateurs; mais j’avoue que je suis moins touché de l’ art infini, et de la magnifique eloquence de Ciceron, que de la rapide simplicité de Demosthene.*”

In order to exemplify that high species of eloquence, which Demosthenes exhibits so successfully against Philip of Macedon, Dr. Blair gives large extracts from his Philippics and Olynthiacs. In these extracts,

which, unfortunately, are in English only, the beauties of the original can be but imperfectly seen. There is one passage in them which we shall take the liberty to quote in both languages, as being at present particularly interesting, and strictly applicable to the times. What Demosthenes did among the Athenians, Britain to the immortal honour of those who now direct her councils, has long done, and is still doing, among the nations of Europe. With a magnanimous, and, at the same time, a humane attention to their interests, she has been their faithful monitor as to evils, which some of them, by disregarding her warnings, now experience, and which others have reason to dread.

Οὐδ' ἡ Ἑλλάς, ἢ ἡ βαρβαρὸς τῆς πλειοεξίαν χωρεῖ τ' ἀνθρώπων· καὶ ταῦθ' ὁραῖντες οἱ Ἕλληνας ἄπαυτες, καὶ ἀκρόντες, ἢ πέμπομεν πρίσθεις περὶ τέτων πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἢ ἀγανακτῆμεν· οὕτω δὲ κακῶς διακειμένα καὶ διοφραγμένα κατὰ πόλεις, ὥσ' ἄγχι τῆς τήμερον ἡμερῆς, ἴδεν οὔτε τῶν συμφερέτων οὔτε τῶν δούτων πρᾶξι δυνάμεθα· οὐδὲ συστῆναι, ἴδὲ κτηνιακῶν βουθσίας καὶ φιλίας ἠδὲ μίαν ποιήσασθαι, ἀλλὰ μείζον γιγνώμενον τὸν ἄνθρωπον περιεργῶμεν, τὸν χρόνον κερδαίνειν τέτων, ἢ ἄλλος ἀπόλλυται, ἕκαστος ἐγνακῶς, ὡς γέ μοι δοκεῖ· οὐχ ὅπως σωθήσεται τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων σκοπῶν, ἴδὲ πράττων· ἐπεὶ, ὅτι γὰρ ὡσπερ περίοδος ἡ καταβολὴ περιετῆ, ἢ τινοσ ἄλλω κακῶ, καὶ τῷ πάνυ σοφῶ δοκοῦντι νῦν ἀφιστάμεν προτέρησιν, ἴδὲ ἰσχυροῖ δῆπτου.—ΔΗΜΟΣΘ. ΚΑΤΑ ΦΙΛΙΠΠ. ΛΟΓ. ΤΡΙΤ.



“ Neither Greece, nor the other nations of the earth, afford sufficient scope for this man’s ambition. Yet all we Greeks, who see and who hear these things, send no embassies with regard to them to each other, nor do we feel the indignation that becomes us. Such is the state of degradation in which we now lie, and such is the mean security which we court, by keeping within our cities, that even to this very day we have been able to perform none of those things which our interest and our duty require. We make no common stand, and we form no league for our common defence. But we behold this man becoming more and more powerful, while each of us, as far as I can judge, supposes, that the time during which he is destroying another is a respite gained to himself. No one of us judges as to those means, or performs those actions, by which Greece is to be saved from destruction. No man, at the same time, is ignorant, that, like the regular paroxysm of a fever, or of some other noxious disease, he

is coming upon those, who believe the danger to be now at a distance.”

When Dr. Blair comes to treat of the eloquence of the Pulpit, he stands upon ground that is entirely his own. Upon this subject he could borrow from no body who was capable of instructing him. His success in the art of preaching had proved the soundness of every rule he adopted, and established his right to direct others in a department, where he exhibited so distinguished a pattern.

The same talent that led Dr. Blair to such eminence as a preacher, fitted him also to judge ably of the conduct of every kind of discourse. Many rules in composition are so general, as to apply equally to them all. The same law holds in each, in regard to the introduction, to the division, to the parts that are narrative and argumentative, and to the peroration. In the Lectures upon those subjects, accordingly, much valuable information is to be found. No wild theory is offered, in which the au-

thor had exercised his fancy more than his judgment; but every rule rests on the testimony of experience, and may with safety be carried into practice.

In the fifth and last part of Dr. Blair's Lectures, he treats of the different species of literary composition. He begins with historical writing, and defines the nature of that, which is properly the subject of criticism. The primary qualities of a great historian are marked with precision; and the character of those illustrious writers is given, in whom they were most conspicuous. To the high powers of Tacitus, among the ancients, all justice is done. The philosopher, the poet, and the historian, we are told, all meet in him; though with rare accomplishments he exhibits considerable defects.

The concluding Lectures in Dr. Blair's course treat of Poetry in all its varieties. The Laws of Pastoral, Lyric, Epic, Comic, and Tragic Poetry, are accurately unfolded; and in doing so, he writes with a bold-

ness, which, in the abstract speculations respecting taste and universal grammar, he never assumes. When he borrows from the French critics, he does so judiciously. His own observations are such, as to bear a comparison with the best, of which he avails himself; and he estimates the merit of poets, both ancient and modern, by applying their works to a standard, in which there is neither partiality nor prejudice.

From the general view taken of Dr. Blair's Lectures, it may perhaps appear, that though they are not the most masterly of his works, yet they do no discredit to his reputation. Much was expected from them at the time they were published. The criticism on Ossian's Poems had been universally admired. Those who denied their authenticity, and those who held their merit to be overrated, agreed with their antagonists in applauding the standard by which that merit was tried. The fame of its author as a preacher had long been established. The Sermons, which he delivered from the pul-

pit, had delighted many an audience, and the few which had then issued from the press convinced every candid reader, that their intrinsic excellence could set the petulance and the rigour of criticism at defiance.

The unrivalled character, then, which Dr. Blair had acquired in his profession, when his Lectures first appeared, made it no easy matter to satisfy the public expectation. To them the keenest edge of criticism was applied, and slips, which would have passed unnoticed from the pen of another, were rigorously marked, when coming from his. Much was said as to the want of vigour, both in the thought and the composition. Though his disquisitions as to grammar were declared to be flimsy and borrowed, yet the demerit of their authors seems to be wholly ascribed to him. His merciless critics, eager to assume a consequence to which they were not entitled, forgot, that to the merit of entire originality he never laid claim. As a teacher of youth, he was



more anxious to accommodate his matter to their capacity, than to the whim of conceited theorists. Upon slight defects his malignant critics fastened their envenomed tooth. In spite of every attempt, however, to mislead the sense of the public, Dr. Blair's Lectures hold a respectable place in the estimation of the learned. Though they are not his most correct productions, yet the taste of the author, and the value of his collection, can never cease to command the admiration of the discerning. The world must ever feel indebted to his labours, and must respect his ability as a critic, in which capacity only we have as yet had occasion to view him.

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THE severity of criticism has shewn itself in no instance more remarkably, than when applied to those discourses that are intended to instruct and to reform mankind. While the hearer of sermons confesses himself to be both ignorant and wicked, he gives few signs of that modesty which becomes his situation. He assumes the privilege of being the critic of his teacher. The doctrines held out for his improvement are tried by a standard of his own creation. He often hears the preacher with cold indifference, and rashly judges of the nature of the prescription, even when he confesses himself ignorant of the nature of the disease. Did that, which holds generally, hold universally with the hearers of sermons, the art of the preacher could never be exerted with effect. The arrogance of a critic, and the docility of a learner, cannot exist in the same

person. Before instruction can be communicated, its use must be felt; and no skill on the part of the teacher can combat that unaptness which arises from conceit.

To the eloquence of the pulpit, at the same time, criticism may be fairly applied. A hearer, who is willing to profit by the instructions offered, is entitled to judge of their excellence, by the effect which they produce on himself. He, who believed before, may have his faith confirmed; and virtuous impressions already existing may receive additional strength.

The difficulty of excelling in pulpit eloquence may be inferred from the small number of those who have become conspicuous in that species of oratory. Though many have reached, and even surpassed mediocrity, yet few have attained to distinguished eminence. To the ambition of churchmen, in some countries, no ordinary objects are held forth. In these, however, the vigour of the exertion has seldom corresponded with the value of the prize; and

fewer, perhaps, of the high exertions of oratory have been heard from the pulpit, than in the senate or at the bar. Each of the three fields has advantages and disadvantages peculiar to itself; to which, in order to ascertain what constitutes the merit of a distinguished preacher, it may be proper to attend.

The necessity of a liberal education may be held common to all in the different professions. Without this, the purposes of nature in bestowing genius would be frustrated; and her best gifts, unimproved, would be beheld with regret. In acquiring intellectual improvement, the success of the student rests on his own exertion; and in none of the learned professions does there exist any limitation of the degree in which such improvement is needed. The industrious possessor of talents takes a place in the estimation of the world, which no good man will deny him.

In regard to moral improvement, on the other hand, the case is different. Though

no man of loose principles will be heard with pleasure, and though the character of the speaker always affects the weight of his argument, yet in all the subjects of eloquence, strict probity upon the part of the orator is not alike indispensable. Men will forgive in the politician and in the lawyer, what they condemn in the Divine. An approach to relaxed morality in the first of these, is held venial from the situation in which the agent is placed. A more liberal canon is applied to the conduct of those styled men of the world, than to others around them.

To the barrister, too, certain indulgences are given, which his profession is supposed to require. It is his avowed duty to conceal what would hurt his client; to try at times to mislead the judge, and often to make the worse appear the better reason. Modes of thinking and reasoning, held in some degree professional, escape the censure which would otherwise pursue them; and as long as the general character of the senator and



the lawyer remains unimpeached, the most rigorous standard is not applied to the conduct of either. The situation of the preacher, in the respect now mentioned, is much more trying than that of those compared with him. Though he tells his audience, that the commandment which he holds forth admits of a liberal interpretation, yet little allowance is made for his personal frailty. By exaggerating the foibles of their instructor, men wish to screen themselves from his reproof; and by a foolish demand of perfection, where it can never exist, they depreciate merit, which is entitled to their respect.

There may be errors, however, upon the part of the preacher, not to be palliated by the weakness of his audience. High as is the authority upon which his precepts rest, they must be delivered with the mildness of a Christian. Even in the warnings which he is obliged to give, affection must be manifest; and though he “knows the terrors of the Lord,” he must “in meekness in-

struct those that oppose themselves." The least symptom of arrogance would diminish his usefulness. It would create a jealousy of those arts, upon which priestcraft erects its dominion.

The art of the preacher is brought to a severe proof, not only by the prejudices, but also by the mixed nature of his audience. In the promiscuous croud which he is called to address, very different portions of ability belong to those composing it. To this original difference in mind, is to be added, an endless variety of character, arising from modes of education, and from casual prepossessions. One man is unable to apprehend, what another is unwilling to believe. The same sentiment which delights people of one description, disgusts those of an opposite. Though no innocent prejudice should be shocked by the preacher, yet he must boldly censure what he cannot palliate. By excessive lenity he might betray the cause of virtue, which he is bound to support; and by excessive rigour, he might

counteract the spirit of the religion which he professes to inculcate.

When the senator and the lawyer exert their eloquence, they are hardly, if at all, exposed to such trials of delicacy and skill. The former addresses men upon a level with himself, in as far as equality depends on things external. In both houses of parliament, whatever diversity may exist in the political opinions of the members, there is none in the rank entitling each to hold his place. Jealousy, as to their respective privileges, is a sentiment common to all; and in their pursuits and their acquirements, there is often but a slight disparity. The task imposed on the lawyer, in this respect, seems easier than even that of the senator. His eloquence is exerted to convince one or a few judges, or a jury that is not very numerous. In any of the cases stated, the hearers are supposed capable of following the speaker's reasoning; and prejudice can hardly operate upon men guided, to a certain extent, by positive statute, and by a sense of equity.

In point of subject, the preacher seems to possess advantages that cannot be dissembled. It is one in which all men are concerned, and in which their highest interests are involved. While the powers of the barrister support the rights of an individual, and those of the senator the prosperity of a nation, the aim of the preacher is higher than either. He has it in charge to teach both, that in public and private transactions the rights of men are to be respected; and he tries to remove the grounds of animosity among individuals, and among nations. He calls the attention of the world, not only to the best means of maintaining interests that are present and temporal, but to the only means of acquiring others that are future and eternal. What subject, in point of sublimity, can be compared with that, which treats of the being and the perfections of God? How do the sanctions of human laws dwindle into nothing, when opposed to those of the divine!

The lawyer is often called to discuss points that afford no room for displaying

his eloquence. When he illustrates dark subjects, or reconciles jarring decisions, any thing like rhetorical power would expose him to ridicule. Few can follow a train of metaphysical reasoning, even when properly applied, or see the beauty of an ingenious eviſion of the truth. Every hearer, at the ſame time, meaſures the ſpeaker's capacity by his own, and fooliſhly perſuades himſelf, that no meaning exists, when he is too dull to apprehend it. Were the ſubjects treated by the lawyer thoſe only that have now been mentioned, the eloquence of the bar could never have exiſted. There are times, however, when his field changes, and when he muſt leave the purſuit of hypercritical diſtinctions. In vindicating a civil right, and in repelling a criminal charge, he muſt work on the feeling, as well as on the underſtanding, of his audience. He then appeals to the law that is written by the hand of Nature, from which the guilty inſtinctively dread puniſhment, and the innocent ſeek protection.



He supposes the judge to be aware of its sanctions, and reasons upon those great principles of equity, which existed before any human enactment, and were co-eval with man.

The deliberations in the senate afford a field for eloquence, in some respects superior, and in all equal, to that presented by the pleadings at the bar. No subtle discriminations, in the former, engross the hearer's power of reasoning, and cramp his fancy. As the points discussed always affect the interests of a nation, they can never cease to be important. Few hear debates with indifference, in the issue of which they are themselves concerned; and public expectation is roused by their subjects being previously known. The lawyer and the preacher, again, seldom enjoy this advantage. No notice is given by the former of the point that is to be pleaded; and when the latter ascends his pulpit, his audience know nothing as to the subject of his discourse.

Though the preacher chuses his subject from a variety of topics, yet the range of his choice is known to his hearers. Every point of doctrine that he can adopt at the time, must have repeatedly engaged the attention of those whom he is called to address. To subjects, thus trite and familiar, no powers can give the charm of novelty. When his text is announced, his hearers anticipate what he is to say. If his observations tally with what they have heard, they are regarded as common, and he may be unjustly accused of not thinking for himself. In the subjects, again, of the barrister's pleadings, and of the senator's debates, there appears a variety that is endless. Though the same principle may apply to a number of each, yet every hearer does not see this, and every case is clothed with circumstances peculiar to itself. The fate of persons, besides, forms an object that is tangible and interesting; while the essence of those virtues and graces, which the preacher delineates, is often too subtle for either rousing the attention, or influ-

encing the conduct, of those to whom he speaks.

The preacher also has to lament the disadvantage of having no adversary to contend with. Whatever his doctrines are, they are received, at least in appearance, with implicit assent. No jealous antagonist watches every sentiment as it is uttered, with a view either to refute his reasoning, or to force him to a reply, which may give room for a new attack. Secure from the malignity of criticism, he is apt to shrink from the laborious effort, by which other speakers can, in the eye of the judicious, set it at defiance. The ardour of debate does not enliven his genius, as in the senate, and at the bar, where man sharpens man. Where there is no conflict, there can be little exertion. Even the ambitious submit not to labour, but when labour is required; and high efforts of eloquence are then only to be expected, when the speaker is as much afraid to commit a fault, as the hearer is eager to detect it. The preacher,

then, who acquires the highest eminence in his profession, must have had the best gifts of nature committed to him, and must have zealously improved the trust. If, in some respects, he has the advantage of the senator and the barrister, yet in many, they have manifestly the advantage of him. To excel in any of the departments, requires a force of genius that is seldom to be seen. The preacher, however, who is unrivalled in his profession, must have left others who moved in it far behind him. It may be more easy, as a great French critic observes, to preach than to plead; but it is well added, that it is more difficult to preach well, than to plead well. The following remarks of M. Bruyere, upon the difficulty of the preacher's art, cannot be too much admired:—“ *L'eloquence de la chaire, en ce qui y entre d'humain et du talent de l'orateur, est cachée, connue de peu de personnes, et d'une difficile exécution.—Il faut marcher par des chemins battus, dire ce qui a été dit, et ce que l'on prevoit que vous allez*

dire : les matieres sont grandes, mais usées et triviales ; les principes surs dont les auditeurs penetrent les conclusions d'une seule vûe ; il y entre des sujets qui sont sublimes : mais qui peut traiter le sublime ?—Le predicateur n'est point soutenu, comme l'avocat, par des faits toujours nouveaux, par de differens evenemens, par des aventures inouies ; il ne s'exerce point sur les questions douteuses, il ne fait point valoir les violentes conjectures, et les presumptions ; toutes choses, neanmoins qui elevent le genie, lui donnent de la force, et de l'etendue, et qui contraignent bien moins l'eloquence qu'elles ne la fixent et ne la dirigent. Il doit au contraire, tirer son discours d'une source commune et ou tout le monde puise ; et s'il s'ecarte de ces lieux communes, il n'est plus populaire ; il est abstrait ou declamateur ; il ne preche plus l'evangile ; il n' a besoin que d'une noble simplicité, mais il faut l'atteindre ; talent rare, et qui passe les forces du commun des hommes ; ce qu'ils ont de genie, d'imagination, d'erudition, et de memoire, ne leur sert souvent qu' a s'en eloigner.—On croit voir



*qu'il est plus aisé de prêcher que de plaider, et plus difficile de bien prêcher que de bien plaider.*"—Les Caractères, ou les mœurs de ce siècle. Tom. 2d. p. 251.

After viewing the Senate, the Bar, and the Pulpit, as fields for the display of eloquence, and marking the difficulties peculiar to each, it may be proper to establish a standard for judging of the preacher's merit, when called to practise his art. There are certain great rules in composition, by which discourses of every kind are regulated, and which those distinguished for rhetorical talents never neglect. There are others which, when duly observed, constitute more immediately the beauty of sermons, and which lead to eminence in that very delicate species of writing. A successful preacher must feel precisely the nature of the duty required of him. This duty, if properly apprehended, will be understood to be both arduous and interesting. It supposes the person undertaking it to combat propensities not easily resisted, and to mortify the

pride of man, by holding out to him a just though an humbling picture. He who flatters the prejudices, or extenuates the vices of his audience, is a traitor to the cause which he espouses. Though the avowed friend of virtue, he is its secret enemy; and he seeks the favour of others, at the expense of every thing valuable to himself.

But it is the business of the preacher, not only to deter others from the commission of what is evil, but also to persuade them to the practice of what is good. With a view to impress his doctrines upon their hearts, he must appeal to their understandings. Genuine eloquence shews itself by operating upon each, and renders both subservient to one common end. It gives permanence to the emotion, that would be otherwise transient, and energy to the conviction, that must stimulate an agent by influencing his will.

In order to produce an effect so difficult and momentous, every part of a sermon must be composed with care. Though a

man of genius shews himself even in a production that is hasty, yet he wounds the discerning critic, who catches the least defect, and perceives its cause. His audience is often blamed, when the fault is not theirs. Had the rules of his art been observed, he might have summoned the attention, which they would have been willing to yield. He might have done so, indeed, by means of which they were unconscious, and exhibited a species of skill the more meritorious, that it was unperceived.

The ability of the preacher is perhaps never put to a severer test, than when he begins to address his audience. Every ear he finds then open, and every mind unoccupied. He has to court the attention of his hearers, without seeming to obtrude himself upon it. He must appear the friend of those whom he addresses, and less anxious to exhibit skill in his art, than to promote their interest. His subject must be held forth as important, and such, at the same time, as may be easily and shortly

discussed. The docility of his hearers must be secured by the removal of every prepossession against the point which he means to establish. His manner ought to be calm and dispassionate. Far from striking a note at the outset which he cannot afterwards reach, he must conceal and keep in reserve those powers, by which he is to animate his audience. In the introductions of Demosthenes, the orator almost forgets himself, and presses forward to the business with an ardour, which he seems often unable to check.

In the division of his discourse, the preacher gives a specimen of his talents as a logician. The distribution must be so conducted, that nothing essential is omitted, and nothing superfluous introduced. Each part, of course, stands clear of the rest, however nearly allied to them. The subject must be exhausted by the parts, into which it is divided; and all the points of consequence should appear to have been at once in the speaker's eye. The simplest

of these should take place of those that are complex ; so that, by the regularity of their arrangement, the whole become luminous. A division thus conducted pleases the discerning, and arrests their notice. It is the surest means also of informing the ignorant, who suffer from the confusion of superficial instructors. It rests on those first principles of reasoning which all inherit from nature, though they are improved by few.

When the preacher is called to relate, which is seldom the case, his narration should be distinct and concise. Men would withhold their attention from what his dullness embarrasses, and would grudge also to have it needlessly prolonged. The same rules, which are his guides when he relates, should be so likewise when he explains. His style should be simple and correct, and void of any ornament that might divert the hearer's attention. The doctrine of his text should be distinctly stated, and the slightest boundary marked by which it is separated



from that of other texts, though nearly allied to it.

Each of the parts of a sermon thus treated holds a distinct place, and presents itself in a train that cannot be altered. Rhetoricians talk also of the argumentative and the pathetic parts. These, however, appear rather to be qualities diffusing themselves over the whole, than the separate constituents of a discourse. From no one part of it can argument be banished; and an orator may see reason to rouse the feelings of his audience at very different times. In forming and in arranging his arguments, the preacher gives as clear proofs of the correctness of his conceptions, as in dividing his discourse. Those drawn from topics essentially distinct, should not be blended; and those that are similar, should not be set asunder. By preserving uniformity in this respect, confusion is avoided. Whatever embarrasses the hearer, diminishes the speaker's power; and the general impression is enfeebled, when the means,

intended to excite it, are not duly distinguished.

In the arrangement of arguments, too, much art may be displayed. There are times when the most powerful should take the lead, and the least so should follow. There are others, when this order should be reversed, and when the speaker should seem to abandon every preliminary argument, and rest upon the last. Above all things, he should beware of multiplying them needlessly. By thus seeming to distrust his cause, he makes others do so; and vain would be the attempt to balance, by the number of his arguments, any deficiency in their strength.

In the due management of the pathetic part of a discourse, more talent is requisite than in that of the argumentative. To excel in the former, delicate sensibility must be united with a sound understanding. This sensibility must be under the control of reason, and must display itself only in its proper place. An injudicious attempt to

rouse the feelings of an audience, disgusts the discerning, and produces on the simple no permanent effect. If the audience anticipate the speaker's intention to move them, they are instantly set upon their guard. Afraid of becoming the dupes, they become the critics, of his eloquence. They will yield to an indirect, when they would resist any studied attempt; and they will behold with coldness that false animation in the speaker, in which they cannot participate.

As much art is requisite to raise such high emotions, so no less is requisite to preserve them in their native vigour. The style of a pathetic orator will exhibit an artless simplicity. He will feel too strongly the animated conception which he excites in others, to chace those resemblances which present themselves to his fancy when cool. He will sacrifice every thing to the object then before him, which is to touch the heart. A false ornament he will feel to be a studied deformity, and he will keep the

emotion, which he has had the art to excite, in the channel in which he wishes it to run. He, who attempts to be pathetic long, can never be so at all. A real orator allows the feelings of his audience to unbend, before they are strained. He leaves the tone of passion gradually, and cautiously avoids the dangers of too hasty a descent.

When the preacher comes to his peroration, he must be careful to maintain the ground that he has acquired. He must neither end abruptly, nor try the patience of his hearers, by dwelling upon matter that is trivial, or foreign. Every conviction produced upon their understandings, he must fortify, by rousing the feelings of their hearts. He must retire from his pulpit with a good grace, leaving on the minds of his audience an impression, that in his reasoning there was no sophistry, and that the sole object of his exertion was to persuade them to what is good.

From the general difficulties, then, that attend the eloquence which belongs to the

Pulpit, and the art that is necessary for composing a single discourse, it must be no easy matter to earn the reputation of a distinguished preacher. He, who stands high in this department of letters, must have suffered and done much. If we examine a few of Dr. Blair's Sermons by the rules which we have attempted to establish, we shall be the more disposed, perhaps, to admire what they present as excellent, and to forgive what may seem to deserve censure.

In the ninth Sermon of the third volume, he discourses upon idleness, and views this habit in a light, in which it is not commonly considered, as a violation of religious duty. His text is in Mathew, xx. 6. and the words are, "Why stand you here all the day idle?"

The view taken by Dr. Blair of his subject in this sermon is simple and natural. He proposes to prove, and does so incontrovertibly, that the idle man fails in duty to God, to the world, and to himself. Nothing ex-



tranéous appears in the discourse; and though the train of ideas is conducted with philosophic precision, this seems to be done without effort.

Father Bourdaloue, in the sixth Sermon of his seventh volume, discoursés upon idleness also from the same text:—“*Pourquoi demeurez vous ici tout le jour sans rien faire?*” The French preacher views his subject in a light different from Dr. Blair’s, and much less consistent with logical rule. Hé considers mankind as doomed to labour, in consequence of the curse pronounced upon Adam; so that one text in Scripture is made to recommend that as a matter of duty, which another holds out as a matter of necessity. The wealth of his hearers, he tells them, does not relieve them from the obligation to labour:—“*Parceque tous les biens du monde ne peuvent vous soustraire a la malediction du peché;—parceque Dieu en vous donnant ces biens n’a jamais eu intention de derogé a ses droits;—car l’obligation du travail et la nécessité de la mort tiennent le meme rang dans les divins décrets.*”

It does not appear, that the labour entailed upon the human race is at all connected with that active exertion which, by implication, is recommended in the text. The former suggests punishment from the severity of the toil denounced against him, who, for his transgression, was in the sweat of his brow to eat his bread. Between zeal in business, and the mean indulgence of the sluggard, there is a wide interval; and as the one suggests the fulfilment, so does the other suggest the violation of duty.

When the learned Father comes to what he calls his second point, he treats the subject with high ability. He had proved, that man might fail in the duty said to be imposed upon him as a sinner, and he goes on to prove, that he might fail in that which is attached to his particular situation in the world. In this last view of the subject, the two preachers coincide. The leading ideas seem to have occurred to both, and they are expressed with equal elegance and ease. By motion and exertion, says Dr.

Blair, the system of being is preserved in vigour. By its different parts always acting in subordination one to another, the perfection of the whole is carried on. The heavenly bodies perpetually revolve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appointed course.—“*Ainsi,*” says the Father, “*voyons nous les cieux et les astres, qui sont sur nos tetes dans un mouvement perpetuel sans s’arreter une fois, et sans cesser de répandre leurs influences.*”

In the following passage, both preachers seem to have laid hold of the same idea, and to present it in expressions of nearly the same import. It holds so natural a place in each of the sermons, that it may have suggested itself to both; so that the charge of plagiarism cannot certainly be brought home upon the latest of the two writers. ‘The order and happiness of the world,” says Dr. Blair “cannot be maintained without a perpetual circulation of active duties and offices, which all are called upon to perform in their turn. Super-

riors are no more independent of their inferiors, than these inferiors are of them. It is sometimes supposed, that industry and diligence are duties required of the poor alone, and that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to become useful is proportionally increased. The claims upon him from various quarters multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand.”—“*Je pretends,*” says the French preacher, “*qu’ a mesure q’ une condition est plus elevée, elle est plus sujette a ces devoirs qu’ on ne peut accomplir sans une action assidue et constante ; et c’ est ici qu’ il faut encore une fois que vous vous detrompiez des fausses idées que vous avez des choses et d’ une erreur pernicieuse ou le monde vous a peutetre jusques a present entretenus. Car la grande erreur du monde est de croire que l’ elevation, le rang, la dignité sont autant des droits acquis pour le repos, et pour la douceur*

*de la vie. Mais la foi nous dit tout le contraire, et la raison est, que plus une condition est élevée, plus elle a de grandes obligations a remplir.*

Bourdaloue, with the happiest effect, introduces the consequences of occasional idleness upon three distinguished characters in the Old Testament, and bids his hearers beware of the rock upon which they split:—  
*“ Nous ne sommes ni plus saints que David, ni plus eclaires que Salomon, ni plus forts que Samson, et pour vivre dans la retraite, nous n’avons pas moins a craindre les desordres de l’oisivité.”*

The general execution of both sermons discovers great merit upon the part of those who composed them. In consequence of the learned Father considering labour, in the first part of his discourse, as the punishment of sin, he deprived himself of the power of enforcing the precept in his text, as agreeable to the active dispositions of man. It was impossible for the preacher to regard the same exertion both as a pe-



nance and a pleasure. Dr. Blair, again, by a more just and a fortunate view of his subject, has employed the argument from which Bourdaloue precludes himself, with the happiest effect. He proves, to a demonstration, that the sluggard is his own enemy, and that he generates and feeds the disease under which he pines. “Rest,” says he, “is agreeable; but it is only from preceding labours, that rest acquires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and sickens; and the pleasures, which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity.”

One of the most eloquent Sermons that Dr. Blair ever composed, is the fifth in the first volume. The subject of it is the death of Christ, and the text is taken from John, xvii. 1. “Jesus lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come.” The object of the preacher is to state those great events which were about to take place du-

ring an hour, the most critical which the world had seen, since hours began to be numbered. In the subject there is a native dignity, of which he was aware, and determined to avail himself. For doing so, no pompous or intricate method is adopted by him. He states six points of view in which this hour was interesting to the human race; and each of these is kept distinct, and is beautifully illustrated.

Father Massillon, in the ninth Sermon of his sixth volume, discourses upon the same subject from a different text. His is taken from John, xix. 30, and the words are "*Tout est accompli.*" This consummation is viewed in three lights; as that of justice upon the part of the Father; and of malice upon that of men; and of love upon that of Christ. Though the method pursued by the two preachers is different, yet each is excellent. In that of both there is a precision which exhausts the subject, and which, at the same time, permits nothing extraneous to mingle with it. In the pathetic parts of

the discourses, it is not easy to say which of the preachers shines most. Those flashes of imagination, which serve to illuminate the subject, are in both frequent and vivid. No attempt is ever made to embellish, that does not succeed; and though the circumstances upon which the ornament rests are sometimes different, they are judiciously chosen.

The magnanimity of the dying Saviour is a point upon which the powers of the preachers are successfully turned. Every attempt of his enemies to degrade, served only to ennoble his character; and the greatness of the sufferer was made manifest in the greatness of his sufferings. "The court of Herod," says Dr. Blair, "the judgment-hall of Pilate, the hill of Calvary, were so many theatres prepared for his displaying all the virtues of a constant and a patient mind. When led forth to suffer, the first voice which we hear from him is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty, country; and to the last moment of his life, we behold him in

possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or a vulgar, of a discomposed or an impatient mind. With all the dignity of a sovereign, he conferred pardon on a penitent fellow sufferer. With a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood."

"*En effet,*" says Father Massillon, "*on sait assez que l'attente d'un tourment, qu'on voit présent et inevitable, est toujours plus cruelle que le tourment même; et qu'on meurt d'une manière mille fois plus douloureuse par la crainte, que par la douleur. Or, la justice du Pere présente distinctement à l'ame du Sauveur tout l'appareil de la croix; la nuit du Pretoire; les crachats, les soufflets, les fouets, les derisions, le bois fatal; ces images affreuses la crucifient par avance.—Sur le Calvaire, toute la nature en desordre s'intéressera pour lui; ses ennemis mêmes le reconnoîtront pour Fils de Dieu: ici, il souffre dans les ténèbres et dans le silence; et ses plus chers disciples l'abandonnent."*

Passages that are equally pathetic are so extremely numerous in the two sermons, that it is impossible to transcribe them. The sermons resemble each other in the glow and general spirit with which they are written, but not in their particular parts. While the powers of the two preachers may be judged of by the ability with which each has acquitted himself upon the same subject, it does not appear that Dr. Blair has borrowed an idea from his predecessor. The animation with which he has composed this sermon comes nearer that of French sermons in general; but when he chuses to rise above his ordinary level, he needs no foreign aid to support him. Full of his subject, he seems to have had abundance of matter suggested by his own invention. Every striking circumstance is collected to heighten the splendour of the description, and to support the intrinsic dignity of his theme. The unaffected ardour of the speaker does not prevent him from seeing and pursuing the clearest method. In the me-



thod itself there are no signs of labour ; and its adoption seems natural to those who would themselves have been incapable of forming it. As the best possible arrangement is laid hold of without effort, much art is successfully expended in concealing the art that is actually employed.

In the third Sermon of the third volume, Dr. Blair treats of the proper improvement of time. His text is taken from Genesis, xlvii. 8. “And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, how old art thou?” He considers this question as suggesting to every person, to whom it may be put, three different portions of his life, the past, the present, and the future. He proposes to consider the manner in which we ought to be affected, by attending to each of these periods ; and, with his usual judgment arranges his observations with such correctness, as to carry his reader constantly along with him.

The first observation, under the first head, is so exceedingly obvious, that it seems to

have been hardly necessary to make it. "According to the progress which we have made in the journey of life, the field which past years present to our view will be more or less extensive." The justice of this remark is seen intuitively, like that of an axiom. It must strike every body to be true that can think at all, yet nothing can be founded upon it as a first principle in science. It does not appear, that, in this part of the discourse, any remark drops from the preacher that is striking or uncommon. No thought seems to have been borrowed; but few, if any, carry the character of vigour and originality.

The following use of the word *significant* does not appear to be entirely pure. "We smile at our former violence, and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great." The term denotes, properly, the power of suggesting, or betokening, something not expressed, and is, of course, inapplicable to those things said to be the subject of wonder. Dr. John-

son tells us, that the compounded word *insignificant* does not, with the strictest propriety, denote *unimportant*, though good authorities seem to sanction this use of it. He declares the simple term, in a contrary acceptation, to be a low word, and does not produce one instance with a view to support it.

Father Massillon has a Sermon, in his sixth volume, upon the same subject, from Matthew, vii. 33. “*Je suis encore avec vous un peu de temps.*” The method adopted by the two preachers is different; though, in the second head of the two sermons, there is a considerable similarity in the sentiment. Both condemn that restless bustle in which most men spend their lives, and recommend the exclusion of those superfluous avocations which consume it unprofitably. The business of a Christian is held forth to be, not that of filling up every moment with useless engagements, but of regulating the distribution of time as reason and religion direct. A wise man, it is said

by both, while he neglects none of his duties, tries to ascertain which are the most important, and to those in particular he bends his attention. By performing every office of life in its due place and season, he suffers no portion of time to escape without profit. By establishing a system to which he rigidly adheres, he multiplies his days by living much in little time.

Nothing appears in this part of Dr. Blair's Sermon which Massillon had not said before him; and in the execution throughout, it should seem the French preacher has rather the advantage.

One of the most elaborate Sermons that Dr. Blair ever composed, is the fourth in the first volume. His text is in First Corinthians, xiii. 12. "For now we see through a glass darkly." His object is to justify the divine wisdom and goodness, in giving us but an imperfect knowledge of a future state. The nature of the subject evidently requires a greater reach of thought, than most writers of sermons are capable

of; and few men, in any department of literature, perhaps, could unite the depth which is necessary for investigating an abstruse point, with the elegance of expression which shone forth in this preacher.

The introduction is composed with such art, as just to unfold the matter to be traced, without anticipating what might be needed to support the argument when begun. The preacher commences his inquiry with a becoming solemnity, and seems aware of the difficulties before him. He, in his own language, attempts humbly to trace the reasons why, though permitted to know somewhat of the eternal world, we are permitted to know only in part; and his purpose is announced with sufficient clearness, without adopting any method, or regular division into heads.

Although the obscurity in which we are involved, as to the future state of man, bears a strict analogy to what prevails in other parts of religion, both natural and revealed, yet upon this analogy no argument is founded.



The sceptic is called upon to correct what he feels amiss, and to state the precise measure of information that would remove his complaints. Upon a fuller display of the celestial happiness than that given us in the Gospel, it is argued, that the powers of man, as an active being, would cease to be exercised. Earthly concerns would not then engage his attention. No object would kindle the spirit of enterprise, or urge the hand of industry. Man would sojourn upon the earth like a melancholy exile, and languish in a situation, in which the objects around him are viewed with indifference, and deemed unworthy of his notice.

Such a change as the sceptic is supposed to desire, is, for argument's sake, allowed to take place. The immediate consequence is, however, that man, with the scene in which he is to act his part, would be changed. The conflict between faith and sense, between conscience and desire, between present pleasure and future good, would cease. Were there no difficulties to sur-

mount, it is shewn, there could be no progress towards perfection. Human life would be no longer that state of discipline which is to meliorate the character of man, and to fit him to become an inhabitant of heaven. The presumptuous wish of the sceptic, if gratified, only changes, without improving, the purposes of his Creator. He proves involuntarily the wisdom of God, who made the world, and the folly of that man who vainly attempts to amend it. As much light, it is said, is let in upon us, as our unripened powers can bear. It is enough to stimulate our desire of a state that is better, and not so much as to make us neglect the concerns of that which is present. Supposed blemishes, then, in our moral constitution, are real perfections; and the defects complained of in the works of God, arise from a disease in the eye that beholds them.

It is hardly possible to conceive a subtle discussion more correctly stated, or more logically carried on. The composition is

as elegant as the subject will bear. Still, however, the great beauty of the sermon lies in the argumentative, which is the predominant part of it. Even if the attempt had been feeble, yet having for its object to justify the decree of Providence, it would have been worthy of him who makes it. The uncommon ability displayed, adds infinitely to its merit; and every reader must be pleased to see such talents as the Almighty seldom bestows, vindicating his ways against the cavils of those, by whom they are blamed, because they are not understood.

There is perhaps no one of Dr. Blair's Sermons which is more characteristic of his manner of preaching, than that upon Gentleness. For writing on such a subject, indeed, he was particularly fitted. Possessing in an uncommon degree that gentleness which he delineates, he had only to look into his own mind, and to give a transcript of what he saw there. The Sermon is the sixth in the first volume, and the

words of the text are from James, iii. 17. "The wisdom that is from above is gentle."

In the introduction, the preacher does nothing more than state the importance of his subject, and the reasons by which he was led to recommend it to the attention of his hearers. The virtue of gentleness, he tells us, does not hold its due place in the estimation of men. Though one which, as Christians, we are bound to cultivate, yet it is degraded by many into a mere external accomplishment, and considered as a mark for covering what is offensive in manners. With a view to correct such false notions, Dr. Blair proposes to explain the nature of the virtue, and offers some arguments to recommend, and some directions to facilitate, the practice of it.

The virtue of gentleness is defined with uncommon precision. It is distinguished from that passive tameness, and unlimited complaisance, which form the character of a sycophant, and which are destructive of every thing like steadiness of principle. It is described as that branch of charity which

makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. There is no particular period at which its exercise is more proper than another. It should diffuse itself habitually over our whole behaviour, and regulate both our speech and our actions.

After separating gentleness from that meanness of spirit which is unworthy of a man, Dr. Blair distinguishes it from that artificial courtesy which is learned in the school of the world. As this last has not its seat in the heart, it can never render external manners pleasing. It is the snare employed by the artful, when they mean to entrap the unwary, and the cloak of the unfeeling, when they would disguise their intrigues against the innocent and unsuspecting. True gentleness, on the other hand, is said to be native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is as unwilling to inflict, as it is ready to heal, a wound. While it seeks to please, it is unwilling to dazzle, and conceals every ground of superiority which might be oppressive to those beneath it.



The practice of gentleness is recommended, from considering the duty which we owe to God. That greatness, which is conspicuous in his works, is softened by the view which he has given of himself in his word. In the character of our Saviour, no point is so prominent as his gentleness and condescension. In his access, he was easy; in his manners simple; in his answers, mild. Do we pretend respect for his religion, while we indulge that harshness and severity which are so contradictory to its genius? If so, we may retain the Christian name, but we have abandoned the Christian character.

The practice of gentleness is recommended, also, from considering the relation we bear to one another. As society is essential to human happiness, gentleness is the duty which man owes to man. The contemptuous and hard-hearted revolt against their own nature, by foolishly refusing to others those attentions which they may be obliged to solicit in their turn. It is in the

ordinary intercourse of life that gentleness shews itself. Great situations call for great virtues ; but the virtue recommended is formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily exertions.

Last of all, the practice of gentleness is recommended from the consideration of our own interest. It is the quality which makes a man rise in the world without struggle, and flourish without envy. One of this description enjoys a tranquillity that is never disturbed. Viewing with indulgence the omissions of the careless, the follies of the imprudent, and the levity of the fickle, he retreats as into the calmness of his own spirit, and allows the current of life to hold its course.

The practice of gentleness is facilitated, by examining our own character, and learning what indulgence we may need. How can we entreat that forbearance from heaven which we deny one another ? Can we look for clemency from our Judge, when we refuse it to our brethren ? We are to reflect,

too, on the trivial nature of those objects, which often excite contention. When the cause of animosity is gone, its effects often remain; and had violence been restrained for a moment, these effects had never existed. We are, above all things, to regard this world as but a state of passage, and keep at a due distance from those grating objects which every where surround us. Our minds will then become calm and sedate, and we shall treat with the mildness of a superior nature, what in little minds would call forth the bitterness of passion.

As the sentiment is more than ordinarily correct in this sermon, so is the language. Both flow with uncommon ease, and mark strongly the author's distinguished talents for the eloquence of the pulpit. At the beginning of his last head he says, "We are rigorous to offences, and unfeeling to distress." The purity of the expression, "rigorous to offences," may be doubted. The term *offenders* seems the proper correlative to *rigorous*. The uniformity of the

antithesis, besides, might have been equally well preserved by opposing the participle *distressed* to the adjective *unfeeling*, and the whole would have stood thus: "We are rigorous to offenders, and unfeeling to the distressed."

Under the same head there is a simile, in which the resemblance seems to be rather far pursued. "Easily, and from the smallest chink, the bitter waters of strife are let forth; but with difficulty is their course restrained; and when once they begin to flow, they never fail to poison his cup, who was the first to give them passage." The purpose of the comparison appears to be served by the two first clauses of this sentence, in which the waters are said to be obeying their natural law. In the third, a new conception is introduced, and, by a motion in these waters not easily understood, they are conceived to punish the person said to have first given them passage, and to be then doomed to drink them.

Though some objection may be brought to this figure, yet others in the sermon will bear the closest examination. The condition of the earth, if gentleness were banished from it, is beautifully described:—  
 “The solitude of the desert were preferable to it. The conflict of jarring elements in chaos; the cave, where subterraneous winds contend and roar; the den, where serpents hiss, and beasts of the forest howl, would be the only proper representations of such assemblies of men.”

When the preacher is talking of the habitual influence of gentleness, he with great vigour and delicacy of imagination, tells us, “That its exertions must not be like the blaze of the comet, but regular in its returns, like the light of day; not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense, but like the ordinary breeze, which fans the air, and renders it healthful.” The beauty of these comparisons must strike every reader. A squeamish critic may perhaps find fault with the expression, “fans



the air." As the air is the fanning substance, it is not easy to see how it is to operate upon itself. That which receives and resists the agitation, however gentle, must be understood to be grosser than the fluid which undergoes it. Take this sermon upon the whole, however, and it may well be regarded as a masterpiece in its way, and as one of the best that ever came from the pen of its elegant author.

The twelfth Sermon of the fifth volume was the last Dr. Blair composed for publication, though not the last in the volume of which it forms a part. Nothing, either in the sentiment or composition, betrays any failure in his powers. The same virtuous sensibility and discernment of the human character, which marked his early, marks also his advanced years. He retained to the last the art of instructing, and even reproving, the thoughtless, and, at the same time, of convincing them that he was really their friend.

'The sermon to which we now refer has its text in Proverbs, xiv. 13. "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

The intention of the preacher is to prove, that those who propose to themselves the unlimited enjoyment of pleasure, mistake the nature of human life, and the condition upon which it was bestowed; that they vainly attempt to counteract the decree of Providence, and to render their state upon earth what it was never designed to be. For this purpose he considers, in the first place, the obvious consequences of a life of dissipation, upon health, fortune, and character. The first, he tells us, the most valuable of all human blessings, is readily sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure; and hence, if life is not shortened, comes the debilitated body, and the premature old age. No fortune, however affluent, can resist the effects of profusion in those, by whom prudent economy is disdained as a mean attention. They become the prey of the crafty, who

fatten on their spoils, and see nothing remaining to them but the ruins of a broken fortune. As the character of the dissipated man is necessarily conspicuous, it is marked at once, and rigorously condemned. The respectable and the grave smile at his follies, and avoid his company. He thus either dwindles into insignificance, or shines in those fashionable assemblies only, in which it is a disgrace to be seen.

If dissipation be thus ruinous to the external condition, it is shewn, in the next place, to be no less so to the morals of men. The seeds of virtue are soon destroyed by those insidious steps with which the love of pleasure advances. Nothing is regarded but present enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment in future. Then is the creditor defrauded, the tenant is racked, and friends are plundered. Recourse is had to the gaming table, as the last means of supplying unbounded expense. To how many bad passions, and

how many base arts, does this give rise? The wretch, that sits down at this fatal table, full of eagerness and hope, rises haggard and forlorn, cursing his fate, and threatening, perhaps, to end that existence, which is odious even to himself.

Besides, the pleasures of the dissipated are never found to be unmixed. That sense of propriety, which is borne down by passion, though it cannot guide them to what is right, still makes them sensible of their doing wrong. That conscience, which is too feeble to direct, is still able to sting them. In the midst of their riot, spectres haunt their imagination, and poison their joys. The very portraits of their ancestors seem to frown on that licentious waste, which scatters the fortune which their virtues had acquired.

Last of all, dissipation is shewn to be unsuitable to the condition of man, and injurious to society. The mirth of the licentious forces the widow and the fatherless to weep. To supply their oppressive

demands, families are driven from their habitations, and consigned to poverty. The poor murmur when the rich revel in wasteful excess, and issue from their homes, prepared, by those pretended friends who would mislead them, for every evil work.

Dr. Blair ends his sermon with observing, that his admonitions refer to those in the middle, as much as to those in the highest ranks of life. The modes of amusement enjoyed by the former may not be so refined, and their enjoyments may be grosser. Among them, however, there prevails as much proportionate extravagance, as much rivalry in the competitions of passions, as in the most fashionable circles. To serve God, then, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of our station, are the first concerns of every good man; and amusement and pleasure are to be regarded as the relaxation, not as the business, of life.

Dr. Finlayson, speaking of this sermon, in the very able, though short, *Life of Dr.*



Blair, annexed to the last volume which he published, says, with much justice, that “it is written with great dignity and eloquence; and should be regarded as his solemn parting admonition to a class of men, whose conduct is highly important to the community, and whose reformation and virtue he had long laboured most zealously to promote.”

Though this discourse was written when the author was far advanced in life, yet it discovers nothing like a decay either of intellect or of fancy. The method adopted is as strictly logical, and the compositions as animated as ever. No single conception, from the beginning to the end of the sermon, appears to be improperly introduced; and each holds that exact place which belongs to it as a part of the whole. The comparisons, which are frequent, are just, and elucidate the subject they are meant to explain. When the purpose of explanation is served by them, the author stops, and makes no demand upon the ima-

gination of the reader, which is not willingly granted. Even in those metaphors which approach each other in point of subject, there is no mixture; but the chaste elegance of the preacher makes each run in its own tract, however thinly separated from that of the rest. Pleasure, he tells us, not regulated by temperance, is no more than a momentary explosion, a transient gush, a torrent that comes down impetuously, sparkling and foaming in its course, but which soon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. The *gush* and the *torrent* agree in referring to the violent emission of water, and to the shortness of its duration; but the former is confined to no channel, and leaves nothing offensive when it is gone.

The last Sermon which Dr. Blair composed and delivered, was that preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy. It was with some difficulty that his friends prevailed upon him to perform this service to the church. Feel-

ing the infirmities of old age, which had made him retire from the labours of his pulpit, he was afraid that, in this last effort, he might both disappoint the expectations of the public, and be of less use to the society, than other preachers then in the vigour of life.

In the choice of a text for the occasion he appears to have been fortunate. It is taken from Jeremiah, xlix. 11. "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me."

Some observations upon the goodness of God, form the subject of the introduction. —Throughout the world, he says, there is no instance of mere pomp and useless grandeur, but every thing ministers to the general good. The compassion of the Deity, which is the exercise of his goodness towards the distressed, is said to be an attribute upon which the Scriptures dwell. The object of the preacher is to inquire, why God is pleased to represent himself so often to us under this view. Such discoveries

are said to serve two important purposes: They furnish particular ground of trust in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life; and they exhibit the pattern of that disposition which we ought, in our measure, humbly to follow and imitate.

Compassion, under the first head, is said to be that attribute of the Almighty which gives a softening to what is awful in his nature, and fits him to be the object of our trust. It is in man the most benevolent of his instincts; and the belief of its existence in the Deity, saves us from being oppressed with his greatness. In the exercise of it among men, it is accompanied with painful emotions, which cannot exist in the supreme Being. In him there can be no struggle of feelings, no fluctuation of purpose. His benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenor, like the unruffled serenity of the highest heavens. The same principle which prompts the Almighty to regard our natural and external distresses, extends

also to those that are spiritual. It was this which moved him, in the work of our redemption, to feel for the wretchedness of a fallen race.

Such a discovery of the divine nature not only furnishes ground of confidence, but is, in the second place, said to exhibit a pattern, which we are bound to imitate so far as we can. We are desired to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful. Compassion is said to be the character under which the Almighty chuses to be known. He hath taken up the cause of the distressed, and stated himself as the antagonist of those that would bear them down. Without affections of benevolence, and works of mercy, the system established in the universe must cease. Between the high and the low there is a mutual dependence. Each, in one way or other, calls on each for aid. Even among savage and uncultivated nations, the energy of compassion is felt, and its claims are recognized and obeyed.



After establishing the two points laid down in his method, Dr. Blair comes to address his audience upon the subject of their meeting. In the 54th year of his ministry, when advanced age may be supposed to have corrected the prejudices, and to have cooled the ardour, of partiality, he declares his conviction, that there exists nowhere a more respectable and useful class of men than the clergy of Scotland. Exceptions, he allows, may exist in so numerous a body; but in general, while they edify the lowest, they acquire respect from the higher classes of men. The provision allowed them from the public may raise them above contempt, but is inadequate to the purpose of educating a numerous family, and giving them a footing in the world.

With a view to stimulate the generosity of those who heard him, Dr. Blair represents an aged clergyman in a situation that is not entirely ideal, but may sometimes exist. He desires them to figure such a man, surrounded with a family of children,

to whom his chief care had been devoted, and in whom his heart had been bound up. He is supposed to have cheerfully expended his scanty stores, in giving all the advantage to their education, which his own village, or the nearest county town, could yield. But the time of preparation is finished, and these children have to go forth into a world which to them is unknown. Some of their father's friends have been laid in the dust, and others have become insolent through prosperity. With tears in his eyes, he gives them his blessing as they depart, and commits them to the protection of their father's God. How happy if such a voice reached him:—"Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me."

The preacher concludes his sermon with a short account of the Society, and mentions the beneficent purposes of its managers when its funds shall have increased. He states the signal success with which the sons of Scots clergymen have filled several

important departments of society. He bids his audience observe, that some of the first scholars, lawyers, and judges, who have adorned the country, and of those who rank high in the commercial, the military, and the naval professions, were born and bred under the humble roof of a minister. He tells them, that by a seasonable generosity, they may be now ripening in secret the seeds of future genius, and giving the virtuous, who need protection, a fair advantage over those in whom opulence supercedes labour, encourages indolence, and perhaps fosters dissipation.

If we consider, that the author of this sermon was in the seventy-ninth year of his age when he composed it, it must strike us to have been, even in him, an extraordinary effort. He discovers in it a correctness of thought, and an order and delicacy of feeling, which few men possess even in the vigour of life. In his introduction, he anticipates nothing which should be reserved for the body of his discourse; and thus

shews, that his inventive talent was undiminished : In his division of his subject, he is simple and logical ; and thus shews, that he could yet view and arrange it with philosophic precision : In the argumentative part, he reasons forcibly ; and thus shews, that he knew both the strength of the ground he had seized, and the means of defending it from any attack. In the narrative part, he is concise and perspicuous ; and appears free from that tedious verbosity, which embarrasses without elucidating, and is often the concomitant of old age : In his peroration, he is animated and persuasive ; and still possesses the art of knowing when and how to take leave of his audience, and what are the precise impressions that should exist when he retreats.

This last exertion, then, will bear to be compared with some of the best that preceded it. If there is any failure in it at all, it lies in the part that is properly the pathetic. When he was a younger man,

he might have perhaps wrought up the description of the aged clergyman taking leave of his children with more art, and painted with a more glowing pencil the feeling of both at this trying interview. In his beautiful sermon upon the character of Joseph, he is pathetic in a higher degree. The feelings of the statesman, and of his brethren, both before and after he was known to them, are drawn by a master who had studied the human heart throughout all its windings. Even the most delicate emotion he traces to its proper source; and we see at once the magnanimity of Joseph, and the terror of his guilty brethren, tempered with admiration of his worth. The interview between the clergyman and his children, as it does not exclude fictitious circumstances, would have admitted a colouring which the facts related of Joseph, as real history, do not. Of course, it presented a subject that might have been more easily embellished, and which made a small-



er demand upon the talents of the author, to clothe it in its native tenderness.

The composition of the sermon is in every way worthy of its author. He is in it, as usual, temperate in the use of figures, and chaste in those which he adopts. His language is elegant and correct; so that nothing is to be found in it, to which the most squeamish critic could object. He is said to have delivered the sermon with uncommon spirit. His audience was one of the most numerous and respectable that the country could furnish. Numbers assembled from all quarters, to witness the last exhibition of this celebrated preacher, and heard that voice with admiration, mixed with regret, which they were sure they should hear no more.

After considering so many sermons, which, with a few circumstances only excepted, may be deemed excellent in their kind, we may perceive the different ideas formed by French and English preachers, as to the eloquence of the pulpit. The French

preacher generally addresses the imagination and passions; rouses his audience by an animated harangue; and is at more pains to embellish a few thoughts thinly spread out, than to exhibit any rich variety of sentiment. The English preacher, on the other hand, who is often of a temper more cold and phlegmatic, tries to accomplish his purpose by very different means. He regards his hearer as an intellectual, rather than as a sensitive, being. Feeling his own metaphysical power, he may trust too much to that of his audience; and may suppose them able to follow what, in fact, they do not apprehend. He is more anxious to convince than to persuade them, and looks for a higher and more permanent effect, from influencing the understanding than the heart. The French preachers complain of the English mode of preaching, as ill suited to produce its highest effects. “*Les sermons chez les Anglois, sont des discussions metaphysiques, plus convenable*

*a une academie qu'aux assemblées populaires qui se forment dans nos temples."\**

Between the extremes of English accuracy and French animation, the model of a perfect sermon is perhaps to be found. He who can blend these together successfully, and in their due proportions, seems destined for eminence in the line of a preacher. As the emotions which he excites rests not upon feverish sensibility, they do not perish as soon as they exist. They may be laid hold of as instruments of persuasion, that are fitted to leave behind them a lasting effect. The person, too, whose understanding is thus satisfied, does not acquiesce in his conviction, as if it arose from a mathematical proof. It stimulates to action with a well-regulated impulse; and while it adds to the wisdom of the hearer, it imparts to him both the desire and the power of turning that wisdom to the advantage of society.

\* Rhetorique Françoise, par M. Crevier, Tom. I. p. 134.

One great excellency of Dr. Blair's Sermons is, that they discover more animation than those of most of the English preachers, and less than those of most of the French. Bold as his conception and language often are, they seem to be always under his control. The figures which he employs are seen at once to have a foundation in nature, and rarely is any one of them pushed too far. The most vivid emotions which he ever excites in his hearers, imply no suspension of that reason which is required to temper them. His distribution of the subject is simple and luminous, and each subordinate part is found to hold the place that strictly belongs to it.

Dr. Blair's superior ability as a preacher rests perhaps upon no circumstance so much as upon the knowledge he had acquired of the human heart. This knowledge he earned by reading the writings of those most deeply skilled in the science; not from much intercourse with men in the scenes of active life. He could make his

hearers perceive their characters in a light that was new to them. Leaving to others those general descriptions, which, being applicable almost to all, arrest the attention of none, he spoke home to the individual in the language which he understood. He shewed himself to be not only a correct, but a delicate observer of human nature; and by the beauty and the justness of his execution in the picture at large, could reconcile the spectator to what would have otherwise shocked him.

If in reading a French sermon it appears to us often florid and enthusiastic, it would do so still more if we heard it delivered. That heat of imagination which led the preachers of France to employ figures of the boldest description, would admit of nothing in their manner in the least degree cold. In their general method, they affect a simplicity, by limiting the number of divisions to two, or at most to three. In the sequel of the discourse, however, they sometimes become so minute, as to break its



unity by a needless correctness. Their affectation of learning is still more striking. Passages are at times selected from the ancient classics, with a view to display the preacher's erudition, rather than to instruct his audience. Large quotations from the Fathers are taken for the same purpose, and a commentary is given upon a sentiment couched in an unknown language, which the hearers often receive with a blind, and an unprofitable respect.

In the use which French preachers make of passages of Scripture, they are often not to be justified. They are indeed cramped in their choice of texts, by the custom of taking them from the lesson of the day. The connection between the text and discourse is thus inconsiderable, and, in spite of the preacher's ingenuity, it is sometimes impossible to reconcile them. From this fault even the great Massillon is not exempted. He tells us, that the spirit of God cannot become stationary in our hearts, on account of their mutability; and that, in respect to

us, it is a rapid and fleeting spirit ; “ *un esprit rapide et passager.*” In support of this conceit, he quotes that passage in the Psalms, in which the wind is said to pass over the flower of the field, and it is gone. “ *Spiritus pertransibit in illo, et non consistet,*” Ps. ciii. 16. One should suppose, that the preacher was here aiming at a species of wit very much out of place. Though the Latin word *spiritus* may denote both the Spirit of God and the wind, yet this will never justify the absurd transferring of the text, from the blast in the desert to the divine influence upon the human mind. It is no wonder, then, that the French critics complain of their preachers for so childish a practice ; and that they cry out, “ *que les textes de l'écriture employés par les prédicateurs doivent être présentés sous leur vrai sens, et non pas tirés par force au sujet, par des interprétations louches, et des allusions arbitraires.*”

Though such scriptural allusions are more common among the French than any other

set of preachers, yet, even in England, they were sometimes found to 'disgrace the dignity of the pulpit. They give to a sermon an affected smartness, which is not its proper character; and to a preacher, also, an air of foppishness, that does not become him. An analogy that is so unnatural and forced, weakens the argument in place of supporting it. A judicious hearer listens with impatience to an attempt, by which he understands it is meant to mislead him, and, because disgusted with one part of the discourse, he is apt to withhold his approbation from others that may really deserve it.

In the respect now mentioned, Dr. Seed fails more frequently than the other English preachers, and pursues many allusions to Scripture that are fanciful and strained. Thus, having, in his thirteenth Sermon, said, that the universities have justly been called the eyes of the nation, he adds, that if the eyes of the nation be evil, the whole body of it must be full of darkness.

But although the French preachers sometimes fail in these respects, they must be allowed to possess uncommon merit. In the management of the bolder figures of rhetoric, to the use of which passion only and strong feeling lead, they discover much art. Their speakers have been at times disconcerted by the effects which their sermons produced. Voltaire records this fact, in regard to Massillon, and considers the discourse which made the audience start from their seats, and emit acclamations, as equal to any thing of which ancient or modern times could boast. To the high powers of Massillon, indeed, the French critics in general bear ample testimony. He excels in that quality for which we have found Dr. Blair distinguished; a deep knowledge of the world, and of the human heart. This talent he could turn to its most important use. When he wished to be pathetic, he could touch the precise string by which the feelings of his audience were to be roused, and he knew the very point at

which those feelings should stop. In his composition, besides, there is much ease; and, while he is pleasing every reader with the elegance of his language, it seems to be without effort.

In spite of the high accomplishments which Massillon must be allowed to possess as a preacher, some of the French critics have given Bourdaloue the preference. To the latter they ascribe more depth, and a greater talent for solid and acute reasoning. It would be difficult, however, to shew instances in which Massillon has failed in the talent mentioned; and, supposing any defect in intellectual discernment to exist, it would be more than compensated by the superior brilliancy of his fancy. Bourdaloue indeed reasons well; but the subtlety of his argument is often hurt by verbose expression. He is always disposed to dilate, and never to condense his reasoning; and exhibits every prejudice of a Catholic in the most striking colours. He quotes the Fathers in a degree approaching to pedantry; and is at all times



less disposed to instruct his audience than to set off his learning. Massillon and Bourdaloue may well be allowed to have been the ornament of the French pulpit, and to have carried the art of preaching an uncommon length. Of the two, however, we hold the first to have been the greater performer, and regard him as a model which may be more safely imitated.

Saurin holds the same place among the French Protestant divines, which the two now mentioned do among the Roman Catholic. He, too, is abundantly ostentatious of his learning, and refers, not only to the works of the Fathers, but to those of the ancient classics, both Greek and Latin. Though copious, he is less apt to fatigue his hearers than Bourdaloue. He writes with the ease of a man who thinks for himself, and feels no need of assistance. In several of his sermons, particularly in the second of the second volume, "*Sur l'Immensité de Dieu,*" he shews much talent for discrimination. Of this superiority, however, he

seems rather too conscious, and courts occasions of making a display better suited to excite the admiration, than to promote the improvement, of his hearers.

The eloquence of Bossuet, bishop of Meaux, is inferior to that of none of the preachers already mentioned. His "*Oraisons Funebres,*" from the solemnity of their subject, lead him to use personifications, apostrophes, and such rhetorical figures as require both a bold and delicate hand, His general execution is so masterly, that he seems incapable of attempting what he is unable to effect. The ardour and vivacity of his genius is fitted for the animated kinds of oratory, which the more correct, but phlegmatic genius of the British seldom leads them to attempt.

When Bossuet chuses to be pathetic, he employs, with unerring dexterity, the means that fit him to be so. Every circumstance in respect to time, to place, to character, is touched as it should be; and upon no one of these does he dwell longer than its

importance deserves. In his funeral oration upon the death of the Duchess of Orleans, which is justly considered as the most highly finished, he breaks out in the following pathetic terms : “ *J'étois donc encore destiné a rendre ce devoir funebre a la tres haute et tres puissante Princesse Henriëtte Anne d'Angleterre, Duchesse d'Orleans. Elle, que j'avois vûe si attentive pendant que je rendois le même devoir a la Reine sa mere, devoit etre sitot après le sujet d'un discours semblable ; et ma triste voix etoit reservée a ce deplorable ministere.—O vanité ! O néant ! O mortels ignorans de leurs destinées ! L'eut elle crû il y a dix mois ? Et vous, Messieurs, eussiez vous pensés, pendant qu'elle versoit tant de larmes en ce lieu, qu'elle dû sitot vous y rassembler pour la pleurer elle même ? Princesse, le digne objet de l'admiration de deux grands royaumes, n'etoit ce pas assez que l'Angleterre pleurât votre absence sans être encore réduite á pleurer votre mort ? Et La France, qui vous revit avec tant de joie environnée d'un nouvel éclât n'avoit-elle plus*

*d'autres pompes et d'autres triomphes pour vous, au retour de ce voyage fameux, d'où vous aviez remporté tant de gloire, et de si belles espérances? Vanité des vanités! et tout est vanité! C'est la seule parole qui me reste: c'est la seule réflexion que me permet dans un accident si étrange, une si juste, et si sensible douleur."*

At the conclusion of his oration upon the death of the Prince of Condé, Bossuet gives a specimen of pathetic eloquence, which is indeed a masterpiece; and his apostrophe to the deceased prince, at the end, has the happiest effect. The passage is too long for insertion, but it deserves to be examined. Our English preachers rarely attempt any thing so bold, and seldom bring their hearers to that state of high animation in which they could easily bear it.

Bishop Sherlock, at the conclusion of the ninth sermon of his first volume, gives a beautiful instance of personification, and carries the figure as far as could with pro-

priety be done. The passage is as follows: "Go to your natural religion: Lay before her Mahomet and his disciples, arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword: Shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravished and destroyed, and the miserable distress of the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements: Shew her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine commission, to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired with this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table, to



view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked: Let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross, and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ When natural religion has heard both, ask, Which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had; when she saw part of this scene, through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross, by him she spoke and said, truly this man was the son of God.”

The high taste with which this figure is conducted, could hardly have been looked for, from the general strain of the reverend prelate’s composition. In point of solidity of matter, of acuteness of reasoning, and of a manly and forcible expression, few, if any, of his cotemporaries could rival him. The highest elegance of composition, how-

ever, does not present itself; and yet we occasionally meet with a figure introduced and supported with such taste, as would adorn any piece of eloquence whatsoever.

The eloquence of Flechier is of a more temperate kind than that of Bossuet. Though possessing great powers as an orator, he appears to be more disposed, and better able, to restrain them, and must have carried his hearers more generally along with him. His "*Panegyriques*," like the "*Oraisons Funebres*" of Bossuet, record the virtues of men of eminence after their death. In these there is to be found little of that extravagant flattery of which Cicero complains in the Roman "*Laudationes*." He draws his characters with a very masterly hand. In the "*Panegyrique de Saint Louis*," you see as clearly the qualities that give eminence to an illustrious monarch, as in that, "*De Saint Thomas Archeveque de Canterbury*," you see those that distinguish a persecuted churchman. His Sermons upon ordinary subjects are rich in matter,

which is clearly his own. He exhibits a mind that has no need of any resource without itself. Though Dr. Blair's manner approaches nearer to that of Flechier than to that of any of the other French preachers, yet it does not appear that the Doctor has borrowed any thing from him. In his Sermon upon the use of afflictions, you see a preacher deeply interested in the truths which he is enforcing; but, in the midst of his ardour, treating his subject with a simplicity not commonly exhibited in the French pulpit.

“*Les Oeuvres Spirituelles*” of Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray, contain rather loose hints upon a number of religious subjects, than regular Sermons upon any one. From these hints, however, owing to the manner in which they are thrown together, succeeding preachers may have availed themselves; and the plagiarism, at the same time, may not have been easily detected. In his Dialogues upon Eloquence, the Archbishop shews himself a

great enemy to the division of sermons into heads. Dr. Blair differs from him upon this point, both in opinion and in practice. Among English preachers, the practice of dividing their discourses is almost constantly maintained; and, among the French, the laying it aside would be productive of the worst of consequences. The latter, from the luxuriance of their imagination, are more apt to deviate from their text; and each head serves as a kind of landmark, to guide the attention of the hearer, and shews him how each part bears upon the general doctrine which it is meant to establish. In these Essays of Fenelon's, apostrophes, and quotations from the classics, are as frequent as in the regular discourses of the French. They are, on that account, not adopted as subjects of imitation by preachers in this country, who have less constitutional liveliness, and are less disposed to make a shew of their learning.

It is certain, that about the same period, that is, during the reign of Louis XIV.,

when the most distinguished preachers in France flourished, and before the restoration of Charles II. in England, there was a greater similarity between the Sermons of the two countries than afterwards. The English preachers encumbered their discourses with scholastic theology, and classical quotations; but, in certain parts of them, they roused the feelings of their hearers by pathetic addresses. This mode of preaching became unfashionable; and both the pedantry and the animation were laid aside, as unbecoming the dignity of the pulpit. English preaching became dry and argumentative. A sermon was no longer a persuasive popular oration, but approached to a cold metaphysical essay, in which man is treated as a being of pure intellect, and as devoid of imagination and passion. Had the hearer of such a sermon been ignorant of his duty, he would have been ably instructed in it; but were he, as most hearers are, only unwilling to perform it, no means of persuasion were so much as



tried. The sermon did not interest the heart; and the audience retired from it, as little disposed to renounce old vices, and to practise new virtues, as before it was delivered.

In the powers of abstract thought and acute reasoning, Dr. Clark, Dr. Barrow, and Bishop Butler, have perhaps no superiors. Respectable as these powers are, however, they will not of themselves form accomplished preachers. Though a false conception is screened by none of the embellishments of language, yet, by such means only, one that is just and profound gains admission to the heart, and influences the conduct. Those great divines, who have been now mentioned, shew even a superabundance of logical powers; and, to those who can follow their reasoning, they impart both instruction and delight. In trying to follow their discussions, however, the herd of readers are lost in a maze, from which they can never extricate themselves. By sentiments not accommodated to their

apprehension, they gain nothing in point either of intellectual or of moral improvement. The great end of preaching fails, when admission to the heart is not courted by those avenues which lead to it; and the conduct of man can be successfully regulated by those only, who know his compound nature, and who take him as he is.

The Sermons of Archbishop Tillotson cannot be held forth as a model, though there is much in them that deserves approbation. He is wise enough not to address men as if they were philosophers merely, but to employ in a certain degree the insinuation of a popular speaker. His piety is sincere, and is regulated by good sense. It is to be regretted, however, that his manner is often uninteresting, and but ill fitted to keep up his hearers' attention. His language, at times, wants nerve; and he seems either disposed to grudge the pains needful to polish it, or to have been mistaken in thinking that those pains would have been mispent.

Bishop Atterbury has perhaps come as near the standard, by which a good preacher is to be judged of, as any English preacher whatever. In his sentiment he is always rational, and often acute; and though the sentiment is not the most profound, yet it is far from being flimsy. His style, though occasionally careless, exhibits much elegance and purity. In a critical examination of his Sermon upon "Thanksgiving," Dr. Blair does him ample justice, and shews nothing of the jealousy of a rival. Other Sermons of his seem to deserve equal commendation, particularly that concerning the miraculous propagation of the gospel.

Such are the outlines of the character of those distinguished preachers, both in Great Britain and France, with whom Dr. Blair is entitled to be compared. Each preacher, in each country, exhibits, in a certain degree, the merits and the defects of its style of preaching, as well as those that belong to himself. We might be accused of

partiality to the country to which Dr. Blair long did honour, were we to affirm, that he had surpassed the splendid beauties of Massillon, Bossuet, and Flechier, or the clear and ingenious reasoning of Clark, Barrow, and Butler. In the medium between the extremes to which each set may have leant, he seems to have been desirous to find a place. He wished to temper the glow of passion with the coolness of reason, and to give such scope only to the imagination of his audience, as would leave the exercise of their judgment unimpaired. He tried to accommodate his discussions to the apprehension of those whom he addressed; and, when called to elucidate the mysteries that bear to be inquired into, he enlivened the dark research by the brilliancy of a well-regulated fancy. The reception which his Sermons have met with throughout Europe, after being translated into different languages, proves equally the merit of the preacher, and the candour of his judges. Even those in this country who

envy his fame, hold it prudent to be silent, and to seem to set every thing like jealousy asleep. They are afraid to encounter that tide of public opinion, by which they are sure they would be borne down. In France, his Sermons were never said to be inanimate; nor were they, in Britain, by good judges, said to be superficial. In both countries they have, at once, given pleasure to the gay, and consolation to the serious. By such a mixture of beauty and usefulness, as the world never before witnessed in their line, they have given fashion to a kind of reading that had long been discarded. They have stopped even the voluptuary in his career, and made him leave the haunts of dissipation, that he might listen to the preacher's reproof.



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AFTER having viewed Dr. Blair in the capacity of a *Critic* and a *Preacher*, we come now, in the last place, to view him in that of a *Man*. If, in the two first respects, he appears to have a right to our admiration, he will, in that which follows, discover an equal claim to our love.

In no situation did Dr. Blair appear to greater advantage than in the circle of his private friends. This circle, however, was not very numerous. Though his benevolence was general and extensive, yet he was cautious in bestowing the marks of his esteem. With the foibles of his friends, if venial, he was not apt to be offended. He could make the person who had the weakness, first laugh at it in others, and then bring it home to himself. By a happy mixture of gentleness and pleasantry, he gave instruction without giving offence; and,

while indulging a species of wit, in which there was no sarcasm, he seemed happy in curing trifling defects.

In his intercourse with his friends, too, he discovered the most amiable condescension. To those whom he esteemed, he committed himself freely, and without reserve; and he took no liberty with them which he was not ready to grant. By no affected restraint did he ever put them in mind of his superiority, of which, during his social hours, he seemed utterly unconscious. Had he thus unbended himself in the presence of strangers, which he never did, they would have been unable to reconcile what they saw with what they heard of him. They would have been like those who beheld Agricola upon his return from Britain, whom Tacitus describes thus: "*Multi quærerent famam pauci interpretarentur.*"

Several of Dr. Blair's acquaintance, particularly females, to whom his company was highly acceptable, felt mortified occa-

sionally, either with his silence, or with his talking upon subjects that were trivial and common. Either circumstance they construed into an involuntary sign of his reckoning those, with whom he happened to be seated, unworthy of his notice. This conclusion, however, was far from being just. He was often most attentive to the conversation of others, when he spoke least himself; and he had a singular talent for recollecting the circumstance, from which he judged of the character of each person in a numerous company. When a silent, he was not an inattentive observer. He did not always judge soundly of the people around him; and was more frequently mistaken as to their dispositions than their abilities. He had more pleasure in marking the excellencies than the defects of the characters he was surveying; and his silence was formidable to those only who were strangers to the amiableness of his heart.

In order to convince the female admirers of Dr. Blair, that he was not supercilious in company, and that he could bear his part in conversation upon any subject whatever, his friends sometimes laid plans that were almost always successful. If they introduced any literary topic upon which they seemed deficient in information, the Doctor was always ready to give it. Though he scorned that silly parade with which the learned often try to set themselves off, yet, when his knowledge could be useful, it was never withheld. If any new publication was spoken of, that was better known to him than to the rest of the company, he was ready to satisfy the curiosity of every body around him. Any misapprehension, whether real or pretended, he was ready to obviate. His critical remarks were, upon such occasions, worthy of himself; and his wish to communicate whatever he knew, bore a testimony, of which he was unconscious, that he was formed for social intercourse, and as

amiable in private as he was respectable in public life.

When Dr. Blair was in company with those in whom he had entire confidence, it sometimes appeared how much he valued the approbation of the world, and how much he was flattered with the uncommon share of that approbation which he had obtained. This weakness of his amused rather than offended those who could observe it. He felt, perhaps, that he had earned his fame by means that were entirely fair, and he had no desire to maintain or to increase it by affected modesty. Being free from every thing like guile and jealousy himself, he was, at times, not aware of their consequences in others. The complacency with which he occasionally spoke of himself, was construed by the envious into a ridiculous vanity. It may have been, however, no more than a just sensibility to deserved applause; the fruit of an honest simplicity of manners, existing in a mind that had nothing to conceal. It may have



sprung from what the great historian, just quoted, calls a "*fiducia morum potius quam arrogantia.*"

In mixed companies, Dr. Blair generally took but a small part of the conversation. His natural modesty made him averse from obtruding himself upon the notice of others; and he was more afraid of offending by his loquacity, than of disappointing by his silence. The materials of instructive conversation he possessed in a high degree. But he shewed no desire to add to his consequence, by a studied display of these; and he was satisfied with the reputation which he had acquired in his profession. The unaffected simplicity of his manners attracted notice, when the studied formality, and the artifices of many around him, created disgust. It gave him a command over the hearts of men, which, as he had acquired without courting it, he had no desire to abuse. It does not appear, that Dr. Blair considered conversation to be the channel by which much instruction was to be ei-

ther given, or received. The insipid grimace, with which the talkative try to give importance to trifles, he bore with impatience; and he sought, with eagerness, the society of those, who, by the artless gaiety of their anecdotes, when not too frequently introduced, furnished him with amusement. To the occurrences of the day he listened with avidity; and he was often apt to give them a consequence which they did not possess. He considered the company of his friends as the best recreation from his serious studies; and as, while enjoying it, he made no idle display of his own learning, so he witnessed, with uneasiness, such displays upon the part of others.

In private companies, and particularly in domestic society, he was often most attentive to those whom others were apt to neglect. He had the art of encouraging the diffident, and he knew precisely what degree of notice would be agreeable, and what oppressive to them. He took pleasure in accommodating his conversation to

young people of every description. By such unexpected attentions from a man whom they were taught to respect, he soon gained their confidence, and he saw the early features of their characters appearing without disguise. He could thus successfully encourage every sentiment that was amiable, and check whatever was the contrary.

The subjects of conversation upon which Dr. Blair ordinarily dwelt, appeared to many people so very trifling, as to be almost beneath his notice. Had he not given unequivocal proofs of his being able to attend to higher objects, they would hardly have believed him capable of doing so. Upon every matter of taste, however trivial, he was ready to give his opinion. Such an object, as the size, the shape, and the furniture of a room, if in any degree remarkable, never failed to attract his notice. From circumstances unheeded by every body else, he could extract entertainment. No novelty in the dress of others

passed unobserved by him, and to his own he was scrupulously attentive. In it he exhibited neatness and simplicity, but nothing inconsistent with the dignity of his profession. Even in advanced life, he remarked the slightest change in fashions; and was often among the first to adopt any that pleased him. Such attention to things common and innocent endeared him to his friends, without diminishing their respect. They were pleased to see the man, whom they were accustomed to revere as their instructor, bordering on an infirmity, which others were apt to indulge to excess.

Though Dr. Blair was susceptible of flattery, and received it with a satisfaction which he was at no pains to hide, yet he was, in a high degree, modest and unassuming. The impetuous arrogance by which some would force themselves into consequence, he scorned to imitate. He knew perfectly, at the same time, what was due to himself, and would have felt the denial of that attention, which he thought it be-

neath him to court. His uncommon success in life, and the flattery to which he was daily accustomed, never produced in him the weakness of insolence. He had wisdom enough to see the real grounds of superiority among men. The false claims of the arrogant and the proud he would have scorned to gratify; and while he respected those friends only who respected themselves, he established a dominion in their hearts which nothing could ever shake.

Though in the highest degree capable of advising others, yet he never did so, but when he knew that it was agreeable to them. An obtruded advice he held as an insult to those to whom it was offered. His opinion, when asked, he gave with diffidence, and he stated carefully the reason upon which that opinion was founded. He was more apt to encourage than to mortify the persons consulting him; and often blamed the timidity which prevented them from judging and acting for themselves.



After the establishment of the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of Scotland, which took place in 1790, Dr. Blair had been often solicited to preach the annual sermon for that institution, which is delivered during the meeting of the General Assembly. With these requests he could never be brought to comply, though, at the same time, he gave no reason for refusing them. My honoured friends, the Lord President, the Lord Chief Baron, and Sir James Stirling, then Lord Provost of Edinburgh, understanding that my influence with him was greater than perhaps it was, requested that I would try to prevail upon him to render the Society what they deemed an essential service. His fame, as a preacher, they supposed, would procure a crowded audience; and the power of his eloquence, by stimulating the liberality of his hearers, would increase the Society's funds.

It was not without a considerable degree of hesitation, that Dr. Blair consented

tò this proposal. When I first mentioned it to him, he told me, he was afraid that, in the seventy-ninth year of his age, he would be unable to produce any thing, either creditable to himself, or instructive to his audience. Reflecting, however, on the possibility of doing an essential service to many indigent and deserving young men, his benevolence prevailed over his fears, and he yielded, at length, to the solicitations of his friends.

From what has been said before of the discourse delivered on this occasion, in which Dr. Blair bade adieu to the labours of the pulpit, it appears, that the native vigour of his powers was but little, if at all, impaired. The execution is worthy of the preacher; and the spirit with which it was delivered, aided the impression which the justness of the sentiment, and the elegance of the composition, would have of themselves produced.

As a proof of its excellence, we may add, that, from the admiration with which this

sermon was heard, the funds of the Society derived unexampled benefit. The collection made immediately after it, surpassed what had been ever known; and different sets of hearers vied with each other in the extent of their benevolence. One gentleman, in particular, shewed involuntarily, that his taste in composition is as high as in the other elegant arts. When leaving the church, he told one of the Elders, that, not being aware of the effects of Dr. Blair's eloquence, he found he had less money in his pocket than he was disposed to give. Upon going home, he sent a donation extremely honourable to his own feelings, and to the talents of the preacher, by whom they had been so powerfully roused. The effect of this sermon, even upon those who read it, was highly beneficial to the Society. One friend of Dr. Blair's, in the neighbourhood of London, who had before subscribed liberally to its funds, marked his approbation, upon perusing it, by sending £.50 in addition.

In the number of those, whose influence prevailed with Dr. Blair to preach his sermon for the sons of the clergy, was Dr. Carlyle of Inveresk. This gentleman, who is lately dead, was among the last who lived in habits of intimacy with Dr. Blair during the whole of his life, and who retained his strongest attachment and regard, to the end of it. To Dr. Carlyle I should have been happy to make my acknowledgments for anecdotes respecting his friend, which no one but himself could have furnished, and for much general assistance in the compilation of this work, which could have been derived from no other source.

The same amiableness of temper, which led Dr. Blair to overcome his first difficulties, with regard to the discourse lately noticed, appeared in the ordinary intercourse of life. Though meekness was a predominant feature in his character, yet, even in his well regulated mind, emotions of anger occasionally shewed themselves. He was, at the same time, far from being irritable;

and if the feeling was ever strong, it was also transient. A mind endowed with such exquisite sensibilities to whatever was excellent in human nature, must, of necessity, have been also alive to whatever was deformed in it. Perfection in the character of man exists only in the imagination of those visionary theorists, who, by flattering his vanity, would undermine his happiness. If his capacity of excellence is over-rated, he is lowered in the scale of being. He becomes the misguided tool of the interested, whose artifices operate, like the drug that intoxicates before it poisons. By a pretended benevolence, but a real misanthropy, he is exposed to that political, and that personal degradation, from which, the experience of modern times has shewn us, that it is scarcely possible for a nation or an individual to emerge.

Though Dr. Blair was susceptible of anger, yet it approached to nothing that was boisterous, or unworthy of himself. If the sun rarely went down, it still more rarely



rose, upon his wrath. He felt too strongly the force of those doctrines which he inculcated upon others, to be himself the slave of passion. If the object of his displeasure was not too hastily offended with the severity of his reproof, he would have devised apologies for the person exposed to it. Sentiments of malignity, or revenge, could find no place in his heart. If the person who had unfortunately lost, was anxious to regain his favour, he was almost sure to succeed; and he might have afterwards relied upon the sincerity of his friendship with his wonted confidence. What Tacitus says so beautifully of Agricola, was strictly applicable to this amiable man: "*Ceterum ex iracundia nihil supererat: secretum et silentium ejus non timeres; honestius putabat offendere quam odisse.*"

In matters that would have tried the temper of ordinary people, Dr. Blair often exhibited the most dignified calmness and self-command. The common occurrences of life seemed to present to him no field

for the display of his patience. His friends, accordingly, were sometimes mistaken as to the light in which he would view particular actions respecting himself. To some, which they regarded as trivial, he attached consequence; and in others, which they thought unpardonable, he saw nothing to offend.

When Dr. Blair published his Lectures in 1783, he was desirous that his friends should revise them. He wished to profit by their remarks, and to correct, in a second edition, whatever they might convince him was faulty in the first. Among others, he requested the author of this memoir to peruse the Lectures, which he had often heard delivered; and to try, particularly, to discover any thing in the style that was ungrammatical. Though Dr. Blair had every right to command my services, yet, upon this occasion, I was rather unwilling to grant them. Had I read the book for amusement merely, and perceived any thing questionable in the lan-

guage, I should have been disposed rather to suppress than to mention it; and it did not seem to become me to judge of the execution of that master, to whom I owed any critical skill I possessed. My learned friend, however, pressed his request in such terms, that it was impossible to deny it.

Though I undertook the duty assigned me with reluctance, yet I resolved to perform it in the best way I could. The candour of the learned author of the Lectures I had often experienced; and if the task were improperly executed, he knew that it was not courted. I ran over the book so quickly at first, in order to catch the thoughts, which, though not new, yet were always agreeable to me, that the language hardly engaged my attention. Upon the second reading only, I could pass from the idea to the expression, and judge whether the one corresponded with the other; and I was to mention any expression that appeared careless or inaccurate, and any sentence in which an alteration in the struc-

ture would render the meaning more obvious.

When my investigations began, more things appeared deserving of remark than I at first imagined. Though the list of grammatical inaccuracies, however, swelled upon me considerably, yet I found myself bound, in duty, to communicate it to my honoured friend. The request of Dr. Blair had no appearance of being purely complimentary. Had he supposed, that my observations could be of no use to him, he would not have laid his commands on me to furnish them. At all events, I held it equally dishonourable to express approbation where I was not pleased, and to conceal what appeared to me faulty.

As soon as I had transmitted my remarks to Dr. Blair, he returned me his best thanks for the trouble they must have cost me. He was polite enough to add, that he was happy to find them so copious, as, though he had not then had time to read the whole, he perceived they were such as

he wished them to be. I had afterwards the satisfaction to find, that my criticism, far from being offensive, was highly acceptable to him. He regretted, that some others, upon whose opinion he depended, had not taken the same trouble. He told me, that he did not agree with me in every instance, but was candid enough to say, that he agreed with me in many more than he could have wished. The number of inaccuracies, which were not to be palliated, he said surprised him. This he ascribed to the hurry in which a number of his Lectures had been written when he was appointed to his office; and he added, that when a composition was careless in its first draught, it was almost impossible afterwards to make it correct.

From the anecdote just related, two things may be inferred. The one, that those who supposed Dr. Blair weak enough to think himself superior to error, and to be offended when any error was pointed out, mistook his character. The other is,



that when his Lectures were once composed, they engaged little more of his attention. The whole force of his mind was then turned to the composition of those Sermons, which are certainly productions of higher merit, and upon the excellence of which it was his intention that his fame should rest.

It has been before said, that Dr. Blair was fortunate in entering life with a set of people of the most liberal sentiments. No petty jealousies then existed among men of letters, all of whom, when trying to bring themselves forward, far from depressing, were ready to assist their neighbour. The earliest literary friend with whom Dr. Blair was connected, was the celebrated David Hume. He was a few years younger than the historian, but more nearly of an age with him, than the rest of those men of genius who at one time adorned this country. However much he disapproved of Mr. Hume's tenets in matters of religion, yet he respected him as a man of

science. Even to the enemy of that cause, which he was disposed from principle, and bound from profession, to support, he could shew a candid liberality. He admired his dignified callousness against the impressions of public folly, when he first appeared as an historian, and foresaw a period when political prejudice would yield to the force of truth. He enjoyed the liberality of his manners as a private friend, and that cheerfulness of temper which enlivened every circle in which he was a companion. He felt the value of that unsuspecting gaiety, in which there was nothing frivolous, but which was, in him, connected with every talent which mankind are willing to respect.

During the time that Mr. Hume attended Lord Hertford upon his embassy to Paris, he was absent from Edinburgh several years. The intimacy was supported by a correspondence, which has unhappily perished. The habits of friendship that subsisted betwixt Dr. Blair and Dr. Robertson, were much less frequently interrupted than

those between the former and Mr. Hume. As they were of the same profession, and were members of the same University, the intimacy, which was voluntary on the part of both, was in some degree unavoidable. Whatever diversity existed in the character of these two men of letters, it did not prevent them from being intimate friends. Dr. Blair beheld with admiration, talents in Dr. Robertson, which he was conscious of not possessing. He saw, without envy, that address in the management of business, which would have done honour to a statesman, and which enabled his friends so long to direct the affairs of the Church. He admired that moderation with which he wished to effect his purposes, and which, with him, was almost always a successful instrument. He knew the amiableness of his manners in private life, and respected that disposition to heal the differences of parties, which he himself possessed in an eminent degree.

These intimate friends, however, were not satisfied with admiring the talents which each

possessed, whether in common, or otherwise, but availed themselves of that critical skill for which both were distinguished. Neither of them ever presented a work to the public which the other had not revised. Devoid of every thing like jealousy, the reproof that was given without restraint, was received like the admonition of a friend. Their praises and their censures were alike sincere. Each could make allowance for a friend's partiality; and could anticipate, from what passed between themselves, the reception which he was to meet with from the public.

Dr. Blair's connection with Dr. Adam Smith was early formed, from a similarity in their literary pursuits. The latter, it has been said, set the example of reading Lectures upon Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, and was the first, in this country, who ever made the attempt. Upon any subject, to which the mind of Dr. Smith directed itself, it was capable of throwing light. A timid inquirer, which Dr. Blair naturally was, felt the benefit of such a friend, and gladly availed

himself of every advantage which his company and conversation could afford.

When Dr. Smith became a member of the University of Glasgow, and still more when he travelled with the Duke of Buccleugh, the intimacy between him and Dr. Blair was necessarily suspended. Upon the return of the former to Edinburgh, the subject of his studies had changed. From being purely literary, they had become political, and he was about to deliver to the world his work upon the Wealth of Nations.

It appears, in Dr. Blair's Lectures, that he had had the use of certain manuscripts of Dr. Smith, from which he acknowledges, that he had taken a few hints. When he made the confession, his doing so should have saved him from the charge of plagiarism. Dr. Blair did not know, that this was urged against him, both by Dr. Smith and his friends. The harmony that subsisted between them accordingly suffered no interruption. As few men were less apt to be suspicious than Dr. Blair, so his love for



his friend continued unimpaired till his death. He respected Dr. Smith as a man of delicate taste, of extensive information, and of profound science. Still, however, he was not blind to the eccentricities of his character, and was often amused with the opposite views which he took of the same subject, according to the humour in which he happened to be.

There is reason to believe, that the habits of friendship between Dr. Blair and Dr. Adam Fergusson were not so close as those between him and the men of letters already mentioned. Still, however, they lived upon intimate terms, and entertained for each other a mutual esteem. The manliness and liberality of Dr. Fergusson's character did not escape his friend's notice, and accorded with that unaffected candour and sincerity which were the ornaments of his own. Though Dr. Fergusson had no desire to derogate from what was due to men of eminence, yet every unreasonable pretension he treated with contempt. While Dr. Blair felt the applause of the world

with a keenness that exposed him to the imputation of vanity, he was, at the same time, free from every thing like arrogance. He repaid the attention that was due to him, in a way the most acceptable to those from whom it came. While pleased with himself, he had no propensity to be displeased with others, or to make them displeased with themselves. To every thing excellent in his neighbour, he was ready to give his tribute of praise. This part of Dr. Blair's character was particularly acceptable to Dr. Fergusson. He loved the man who, though beloved by every body around him, took no advantage of his superiority, and increased the attachment by being wise enough not to abuse it.

Few men, perhaps, have commanded the admiration of his friends more generally than Dr. Fergusson. They beheld, in him, the qualities of a high and independent mind, and the total absence of every thing like selfish intrigue. Though a candidate, like others, for literary fame, he had no-

thing of that mean jealousy which has so often been the disgrace of learned men. The gaiety of his manners and disposition made him the delight of every private circle. By this he seized their hearts, while, by a display of talents that was not ostentatious, he commanded their respect. No one of his friends formed a more just estimate of his accomplishments than Dr. Blair. Before the public was duly aware of the merit of Dr. Fergusson's writings, Dr. Blair perceived in them a depth of thought, and a force of eloquence, which have now given them that place in its estimation which they are entitled to hold.

The friendship that subsisted between Dr. Blair and Mr. John Home seems to have been of an early standing. Being both originally bred to the same profession, their habits would be long similar, and many opportunities would present themselves for their enjoying each other's conversation. The poetical talents of Mr. Home could not escape the notice of one

so able to appreciate them as Dr. Blair. In the tragedy of "Douglas" many splendid beauties would arrest his attention; and the high merit discovered in the distribution of the piece, would have been visible even to one who had not the partiality of a friend.

When, to the literary accomplishments of Mr. Home, we add the amiableness of his private character, it needs not surprise us, that he and Dr. Blair were such intimate companions. The attachment, accordingly, that began early in their lives, was continued as long as it could exist. During Mr. Home's long residence in Edinburgh, they had constant opportunities of being together, and both were disposed to improve them. Each discovered a complacency while in company with the other, that could not escape the notice of any body; and it is certain, that Mr. Home's sentiments of attachment to Dr. Blair, continued invariable to the last.

Those mentioned were the persons with whom Dr. Blair lived in habits of intimacy, and with whom, during the greater part of his life, he maintained social intercourse. There were others who acted towards him both as patrons and friends, and who were happy to employ that influence which was attached to their situation, in rewarding his merit, and promoting his success. In early life, he was tutor in the family of the last Lord Lovat, and spent one summer in the north country, attending his Lordship's eldest son, afterwards General Fraser. In this situation he merited the approbation of all concerned with him. That good sense displayed itself in his youth, which was afterwards so conspicuous during his whole life. Young as his pupil then was, he perceived his good fortune in being under such guidance; and gave early proofs of that discernment of character, in which few out-did him when he advanced to manhood.



This attachment to Dr. Blair seems to have grown with time; and, had the General's letters to him not been destroyed, like those of his other correspondents, they would probably have presented something interesting, and worthy of his elegant pen. When General Fraser was appointed to the command of the 71st Regiment, he testified his respect for his old tutor, by making him chaplain to one of its battalions. This mark of attention was altogether unexpected upon the part of the Doctor. He heard the General mentioning at table, to some person, how he had bestowed his chaplainship; and he immediately asked if it was so. The General answered, that the appointment was made; and added, with great good humour, that, as his Majesty had not been pleased to pre-occupy his services, by making him one of the Royal Chaplains for Scotland, he felt it a duty incumbent upon him to make him one of his.

There were few people of eminence, in this country, to whom Dr. Blair was more indebted than to the late Chief Baron Orde. His Lordship, in his official capacity, was a regular hearer of the Doctor's sermons while his court sat, and there was no one better qualified to judge of the preacher's merit. This merit, too, was never more conspicuous than when it was honoured with the approbation of the venerable judge. Dr. Blair's literary reputation was then thoroughly established. He was in the vigour of life; and the unwearied labour which he underwent in his closet, while composing his Sermons, was repaid by the admiration of a discerning audience.

The Chief Baron soon shewed himself none of the inefficient patrons, who amuse those they mean to allow to court their protection, with promises never to be fulfilled. His Lordship's honourable mind felt the obligation he had brought upon himself; and his respect for the literature of the country, prevented him from

sporting with the feelings of a man who had then done it honour, and who promised to do it more. In private life, he bestowed upon the learned preacher every mark of his confidence and esteem. He spoke of his Sermons as affording valuable instruction to all, but especially to those who were deaf to every thing not recommended by the charms of eloquence. When it was proposed to establish a professorship of Rhetoric in the University of Edinburgh for Dr. Blair, the Lord Chief Baron took an active part in giving effect to the plan. His Lordship spoke with confidence, because he had felt the energy of those powers which a teacher of rhetoric should possess. To this creditable testimony his Majesty's ministers paid the attention it deserved; and to it the Doctor reckoned himself, in a high degree, indebted for his success.

But the connection from which Dr. Blair derived most benefit, and which he had it in his power to cultivate for the longest period, was that with Lord Viscount Mel-

ville. As early as the year 1739, he had dedicated his thesis, "*De Fundamentis et Obligatione Legis Naturæ*," to his Lordship's father, then Lord Arniston, and afterwards Lord President of the Court of Session. This event, however, as it took place before Lord Melville's birth, and, as the Lord President died when his son was very young, cannot be understood to have been the foundation of that friendship, with which Dr. Blair felt himself so highly honoured.

When Dr. Blair began to read his Lectures, he was fortunate in having hearers that could discover their merit. Among them he could number Henry Dundas, afterwards Lord Melville; and, from the ardour with which his Lordship pursued his studies, his instructor ventured to predict the lustre of that career which he was destined to run. An attachment, founded upon mutual esteem, could not fail to be permanent. During a great part of his long life, Dr. Blair relied upon the friend-

ship of Lord Melville, and never once repented of having done so. His Lordship also found a corresponding steadiness upon the part of the learned man, whom he marked with the most flattering attention, and whose merit he believed he could hardly over-rate.

The growing reputation of Dr. Blair, which soon extended beyond the limits of the British empire, proved the discernment of that patron, to whose munificence he was so much indebted. Every favour which he received, was *multa dantis cum laude*, and did honour to the hand that bestowed it. In the year 1780, his Majesty was graciously pleased to grant him a pension of £.200. In procuring him this proof of royal favour, Lord Melville would doubtless take an active part. It is said, at the same time, that the marked approbation with which her Majesty honoured his Sermons, gave immediate success to the request. The high elegance of the Sermons was often not so apparent when



they were delivered by the author, as when they were read by others. In his manner there was a stiffness which eclipsed their beauties, and to which strangers could not be reconciled. It is reported, that they were read to the Royal Family at St. James's by the first Earl of Mansfield; and their intrinsic merit never appeared to greater advantage than when they came from the mouth of so dignified a speaker.

From the situation of the country a few years before Dr. Blair's death, he appeared in a light that endeared him more than ever to the worthy and discerning part of the community. Of his ability as a scholar, and his amiableness as a man, he had long given unequivocal proofs; but his loyalty as a subject, and his faithful attachment to the British constitution, had till then no opportunity of shewing themselves. The opinion of a person of his eminence served, in such times, as a guide to the simple. Many, who could not judge correctly upon political subjects, were ready to be directed

by him, whose sentiments upon religious topics they believed to be unerring. He declared from his pulpit, that no man could be a good Christian that was a bad subject. The opinions of those French philosophers, who wished to destroy subordination, and to loosen the restraints of law, he rejected with abhorrence. He regarded those men as the authors of incalculable mischief to every country upon earth, as well as to that which unhappily gave them birth. He beheld them as disturbing the peace of the world, which, with an insidious appearance of benevolence, they pretended to promote.

Sentiments like these from the mouth of such a man, and spoken at such a time, could not fail to be productive of the happiest effects on the public mind. Even with all the energy which his Majesty's ministers possessed, the task of stemming the torrent which then threatened to overwhelm the nation, was by no means easy. Though few among the learned in

Scotland were suspected of any desire to betray the cause of their country, yet even among them, patriotic zeal appeared in very different degrees. In the encouragement of this capital virtue, which both reason and religion recommend, Dr. Blair took a decided and an active share. No mean disposition to temporize upon his own part, or to avail himself of connections future and casual, interfered with what he felt to be his duty at the time. The state, he saw, then needed the countenance and support of all its members; and in the moment of its exigency, he was ready to do what he could. The firmness and vigour which he then displayed, were worthy of the descendant of that illustrious ancestor, who was mentioned at the beginning of this work. From his age and his profession, it could not be supposed, that he was to take arms in his country's defence; but to the side which he so strenuously espoused, he gave all that weight, which is attached to the opinion of an honest man,

During the crisis now spoken of, the connection between Lord Melville and Dr. Blair grew more and more intimate. It was indeed apparent to many, that in proportion as his Lordship withdrew his friendship from some others of the men of letters in Scotland, he bestowed it the more largely upon him. Never was a minister more fortunate, or more judicious in bestowing his favour; for, to the honour of Dr. Blair, it can be recorded, that in no instance did he ever desert the friend with whom he had once associated, or the principle which he had once avowed. Ignorant of the arts of politicians, in which he refused to be hackneyed, he was of all politicians the most successful. His influence over mankind rested on the immoveable basis of intrinsic worth; and he found no occasion to earn by intrigue, that superiority which his undisguised virtues could of themselves command.

Although Dr. Blair did not court opportunities of shewing his judgment in the bu-

siness of life, yet he possessed that power in an uncommon degree. His unwillingness to mingle in its active scenes, created a suspicion of his being unable to do so. This opinion could be formed by those only who knew not his character. Had he chosen to be active in the degree in which he was skilful, we should have admired his energy as much as his wisdom. He was, at the same time, a better judge of measures than of men, of whom his general philanthropy often made him think more favourably than they deserved. In directing a piece of business, in the execution of which he took no part, he frequently shewed himself an able and a judicious adviser. The merit of the counsellor was thus hidden from the public eye, and unfairly transferred to the ostensible agent.

There were certain circumstances peculiar to the character of Dr. Blair, which rendered him in some degree unfit for the bustle of active life. The delicacy of his feelings seemed to disqualify him for en-



during the rude shocks to which scramblers for power must often submit. He had too much sensibility to bear an undeserved insult with indifference, and he was too gentle to repel it with the asperity it deserves. Against those arts by which the fawning often hide their ferocity, he was not duly prepared; and his most partial admirers cannot deny, that in his discernment of character, his judgment was apt to fail him. His perceptions in this way were not sufficiently prompt, to suit every occasion on which he was called to act. To judge soundly of men, it was necessary that he should have judged long. From a belief, that the minds of those around him resembled his own, he was too ready to repose in them an unsuspecting confidence; and the inflexible integrity of which he was conscious, seemed to conceal from him the duplicity of others. When he mistook the character of the man with whom he was called to do business, his error almost always proceeded from the excess of bene-

volence. The amiableness of the cause upon such occasions, furnished the best apology for its immediate effect.

But although Dr. Blair was thus averse from entering into the bustle of active life, and, for the reasons now mentioned, but imperfectly fitted for it, yet he managed his private concerns with singular prudence. In this he was less exposed to deception, and had better opportunities of knowing the men with whom he was to act. With an unsuspecting simplicity he committed himself to his friends, and was as little disposed to take as to give offence. A difference in sentiment, or opinion, was with him no cause of enmity; and he had liberality to forgive what he could not approve. Though his success in life was the best proof of the soundness of the principles upon which he acted, yet he never under-rated those who followed a different course, or boasted of that wisdom by which he obtained his object. No man ever created

fewer enemies, and in no instance was he ever known to have lost a friend.

That judgment, for which Dr. Blair seemed to have been eminently indebted to nature, was fortified by habits of study and observation. His thirst for knowledge was insatiable. In as far as books could unfold to him the nature of man, he studied that nature with indefatigable attention. From his profession as a clergyman, and his engagements as a scholar, his intercourse with the world was not the most extensive. But he was particularly conversant in history, both ancient and modern; and his memory was tenacious of the facts which he accumulated. Tenacious as this power was, however, he even in early life seemed unwilling to trust it. He made abstracts of the most important works which he perused, and thus had the materials of his knowledge more completely at his command.

This practise, by which he proposed to methodize his information upon every sub-

ject, he applied particularly to that of history. In this branch of study, accordingly, his knowledge was alike accurate and extensive. With the assistance of some of his young friends, he formed chronological tables, in which every important fact that occurred in his reading found its proper place. In devising this plan, he discovered a reach of thought that was hardly to be expected at his age; and its excellence was proved by the use that was afterwards made of it. This system, the invention of a student for his private convenience, was adopted, improved, and published by his learned friend, Dr. John Blair, prebendary of Westminster; and every scholar knows the estimation in which the work, entitled, "The Chronology and History of the World," is held.

But Dr. Blair did not confine his attention to facts that formed a regular history; he had a particular pleasure in the study of voyages and travels. These he considered as furnishing him with the natural

history of man in his different stages of civilization. When they were executed with ability, he considered them as valuable repositories; and even from those in which the execution was imperfect, he was willing to glean whatever was worthy of notice. As it was his duty in his Sermons to say what man ought to be, so he was anxious in his private studies to discover what, in a physical light, he actually was. In this view he was happy in tracing the progress of society, and in marking the varied aspects of human nature in its different stages.

Not satisfied with viewing human nature as it appeared in scenes that actually took place, Dr. Blair read a great deal of fictitious history. He not only defended this species of writing against the attacks of those who decried it, but insisted, that it might be turned to very useful purposes. In his opinion, it furnished one of the best channels for conveying instruction, for painting human life and manners, for shew-



ing the errors into which we are betrayed by our passions, for rendering virtue amiable, and vice odious. The fictions of antiquity he considered as having been the great vehicles of knowledge; and the contempt into which that species of writing has fallen, of which such fictions are the basis, must, in his opinion, have arisen solely from the mode of its execution.

In support of this opinion, which is not generally adopted, Dr. Blair used to quote the authority of Lord Bacon. With the works of that great philosopher, it may be observed, that he was particularly conversant, and had borrowed from them rather incautiously. Under the first head of the eighth Sermon, in the second volume, upon Death, he has taken the whole of the idea in one passage, with little variation in the expression, from an essay of his Lordship's upon the same subject. The passage in Dr. Blair's Sermon begins thus: "The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. Honour has defied death; love has

despised it; revenge has disregarded it; grief, a thousand times, has wished for it." But to return from this digression:—in support of the study of fictitious history, Lord Bacon observes, that the common train of affairs which we observe going on in the world, does not fit the mind, nor give it entire satisfaction. We seek for more heroic and illustrious deeds, for more diversified and surprising events, for a more regular and just distribution of rewards and punishments, than we find here; and because we meet not with these in true history, we have recourse to fictitious. If these suggestions, in behalf of a species of writing that has fallen into discredit, be not solid, they are at least ingenious, and, considering the high authority that supports them, they deserve to be respected.

From a conviction of the truth of these remarks, few people were more conversant in novels and romances than Dr. Blair; and to those that were excellent in their kind, he always gave due praise. This part of

his reading he at the same time seemed disposed to conceal. When he borrowed books that furnished him with entertainment in this way, he did not always tell for whom they were intended, but allowed it to be supposed that they were to furnish entertainment to others. From his conversation, however, it appeared, that he had read them with care, and he shewed no inclination to deny that he had done so. An indiscriminate condemnation of all such books, he regarded as a proof of bad taste, and as unfair to their authors. He insisted, that when happily composed, they afforded frivolous amusement to none but those who were incapable of any thing higher, and that superficial observers only did not derive from them the instruction with which they were fraught.

It was the moral tendency of such writings, then, not the love of the amusement which they are fitted to bestow, that attracted the attention of Dr. Blair. The authors of these, as of all other compositions,

might occasionally fail in their attempt ; but the attempt itself, if properly made, was, in his judgment, entitled to respect. If the representation of life and manners was natural, it commanded his approbation as a critic, and the moral had its due effect in rendering virtue more amiable, and vice more odious. By thus seizing every opportunity of beholding human nature in all the different situations in which it had actually appeared, and might possibly be seen, he was deeply skilled in this “proper study of mankind.” What he drew from a variety of sources, he turned to the advantage of those whom he was called to instruct. To so correct an observer of human nature, such extensive knowledge was of infinite use. It suggested those delicate reflections respecting it, which charm every reader, and which commanded the admiration even of those upon whom he sometimes obtrudes disagreeable truths.

That timidity and diffidence in his own abilities, which were unfortunate both for Dr. Blair and those around him, prevented him from taking any active part in the affairs of the church. In the private consultations, however, of Dr. Robertson, Dr. Carlyle, Dr. Drysdale, and others, who managed ecclesiastical business, his opinion was eagerly courted. With those clergymen he lived in the strictest friendship. Though his efforts were not so public, yet they were not less strenuous than theirs, for the introduction of those principles into the General Assembly, which have influenced its deliberations for fifty years, and which Professor Stewart has explained in his *Life of Dr. Robertson*.

After the retirement of Dr. Robertson, and the death of Dr. Drysdale, Dr. Blair shewed himself still more disposed to assist in the management of church affairs, in the way that was agreeable to himself. The aid that was before useful, was then found more so, and gratefully received by those



to whom it was given. Dr. Blair's name added dignity to the measure which he was known to support; and his opinion though modestly given, had the authority of a law. Though he kept himself aloof from the scene in which his young friends contended, yet he entered keenly into all their sentiments and emotions; and he often tempered their warmth without ever compromising their principles.

The influence which Dr. Blair had over the younger members of the church, was greater than that of any other clergyman whatever. Many of them had been his pupils, and with a number of those he maintained a constant correspondence. To his good offices many of them had been personally indebted; and all respected the benevolence of a man, who was ready to extend his services wherever he thought they were due. Into minds thus disposed, the opinions of this venerable counsellor found an easy admission. Their intrinsic soundness aided that partiality which arose

from respect to their author. Though he never supported, in the General Assembly, the measures which he suggested, yet the measures themselves were vigorous, and adequate to the purposes of those who had courage to follow them. With all their vigour, there was no acrimony upon the part of him who devised them. His amiable mind, superior to every thing like selfish keenness, had no desire to hurt the adversary, whom it was his duty to vanquish. As his moral sense was not less acute than his taste, so, in the conduct of business, he scorned to take advantage of any thing like a trick. No man, who supported the measures which he recommended, had ever reason to be ashamed of them. They breathed the honest simplicity of their author, and accorded with the native probity of his mind.

The younger men, then, who had to propose, and to support the views of Dr. Blair, in the General Assembly, derived no small advantage from the countenance of

such a friend. They found in him an adviser, to whom they could with confidence resort. The unassuming manner in which his opinions were given, equalled the ability with which they were formed. Had he assumed an authoritative tone, it would have been duly respected. An amiable modesty, however, made him appear not to direct where he really did so, and decline those submissions, to which his judgment, ripened by years, gave him an undisputed claim.

Dr. Blair would, in all probability, have taken a more active part in the business of the church courts, had he not professed himself to be ignorant of their forms. From a belief of this ignorance, he left it to others to execute those plans, which he ventured only to devise. From this cause, also, he never would permit himself to be named as a candidate for the chair, in the General Assembly. Had the honour been agreeable to him, the Church would have been happy to grant it to a son, so much

celebrated as a scholar, and so blameless as a man.

In respect to his knowledge of forms, there is no doubt, that Dr. Blair's modesty misled him; and at any rate, had he needed instruction upon this point, he might have easily gained it. In those private conversations, in which he bore a distinguished part, he witnessed the detail of ecclesiastical proceedings; and in these, he gave no signs of his being a novice. While debates were carried on in the Supreme Court, he was no unconcerned hearer; and although he never addressed the House, yet he often dropt hints highly useful to those speakers, who gave the business its proper shape.

The outline of the pastoral admonition, which the General Assembly, in 1799, addressed to the people under their charge, was furnished by Dr. Blair. In this, there appears a beautiful simplicity of style, that suits the plain doctrine it was meant to inculcate. The sentiment is happily

adapted to the condition of those for whose benefit it was intended. It displays that Christian moderation, that zeal for true religion, and that contempt and distrust of itinerant missionaries, which were worthy of the venerable author. This last public service may be regarded as his legacy to the church, which he so long adorned. Those who filled up his outline will ever remember, with gratitude, this seasonable effort of a Reverend Father, who had then passed the 80th year of his age.

But Dr. Blair was flattered, not only by the attentions of his brethren in the church, but also by those of his patrons, both as a Clergyman and a Professor. Though the Magistrates and Council of Edinburgh possess great power in the bestowing of benefices, yet to their honour it can be said, that they have shewn no disposition to abuse it. In the election of Professors for the chairs in the University, they have been singularly chaste; and without judging themselves of the accomplishments of



the different candidates, they have numbered and weighed the testimonies in favour of each. Feeling their responsibility to the public, as the patrons of an illustrious seminary, they have been anxious to discharge their important trust with scrupulous integrity. In the choice of advisers, too, they have shewn much wisdom. Neglecting the opinion of those who were often most willing, though least able, to direct them, they have submitted to the guidance of the most distinguished in that branch of science, for which a teacher happened to be wanted.

From what has been said of Dr. Blair, few men can be supposed to have been more fit for giving that aid, which the Magistrates of Edinburgh may be understood occasionally to require. As he lived much in the literary world, and as his society was courted by people of every description, his means of information were extensive. Few men of eminence, as scholars, were unknown to him; so that, when others spoke from

general report, he could often give his opinion from the surer testimony of personal acquaintance. In communicating his advice, it appeared, that he was biassed by no regard either to himself or to his party. Superior to every thing like political stratagem, he bore an honest testimony, that was strictly consonant with the opinion which his knowledge justified. His judgment, like those of all men, might be occasionally wrong. Against the duplicity of the character observed by him, or the arts and mistakes of those who reported it, he was not proof; but in no instance did he ever mislead others, without being himself deceived.

Sir James Hunter Blair and Mr. Elder, accordingly, when chief Magistrates of Edinburgh, saw too strongly the value of Dr. Blair's advice, not to avail themselves of it. To him they resorted with confidence, when any difficulty arose. They knew, that, abandoning to others the fame of a politician, which he did not court, he could accomplish, by fair means, what the

politician often vainly attempts. While they followed his counsels, they anticipated that success which usually attended them. Even though the plans which he suggested failed, they knew that those plans would bear examination. They would betray no mean regard to himself, nor to a party, and reflect no dishonour on that respectable body, over which the gentlemen who consulted him, presided. In framing their addresses to the Sovereign, none could judge more soundly as to the matter to be adopted; and in elegance of expression, he could be rivalled by few.

Upon the death of Dr. Robertson, in the year 1793, it was no easy matter to find men qualified to fill those situations which he had held with so much honour. His literary eminence, as an historian, was known and acknowledged throughout Europe. Foreigners who understood not the language in which his works first appeared, availed themselves of the many translations into others which they knew. In managing the business of the Church of Scotland, he had

discovered much political wisdom; and his eloquence in the Supreme Ecclesiastical Court, commanded the admiration of all who could judge of it. Several years previous to his death, when certain changes had taken place in the political influence which directed the affairs of Scotland, he judged it prudent to retire from the public business of the Church; and shewed himself superior to that obstinacy, which keeps a man from retreating before he is forced to give way. In the affairs of common life, he discovered the same good sense, as in conducting those of the public; and was alike skilful in preventing and in accommodating differences.

It was, perhaps, more difficult to find a proper successor to Dr. Robertson, as Principal of the University of Edinburgh, than in any of his other offices. To a place in itself respectable, the character of the incumbent had given additional lustre. During his last illness, and while he perceived that, in spite of the skill of his physicians,

his disease was gaining ground, he gave his friend Dr. Blair a proof both of the liberality of his mind, and of the sincerity of his attachment. He told him, that he was aware of the approach of death; that he wished to have a creditable successor; and that, in his opinion, no man had the same claim to fill his place which Dr. Blair himself had. He begged, that no delicacy towards him, or his family, might prevent Dr. Blair from making the proper applications; and assured him, that he should die with greater satisfaction, if he had reason to anticipate his friend's success. Sentiments of such dignified liberality upon so trying an occasion, awakened in the mind of Dr. Blair those of admiration and gratitude. Though he was at first overpowered by his nice sensibility to whatever was amiable and great, yet he soon made the answer to be expected from him. He assured his friend, that no prospect of private emolument could compensate that of being separated from one he so sincerely esteemed; that he hoped Dr.



Robertson would still live to preside in the university, which he had so long adorned; and that he himself would make no premature attempt to obtain an office, which he was incapable of filling as it was then filled.

From the manner in which Dr. Blair conducted himself after Dr. Robertson's death, it appeared, that he had other reasons for declining to follow his friend's advice, besides those which he reckoned it proper to mention to him. His claim to the preferment he knew was acknowledged by every body; and he had trusted, that the unanimous voice of the country would supercede the necessity of any exertion upon his part. *Haud semper errat fama aliquando et eligit.* The patrons of the University perhaps understood, that if the office was an object of his ambition, at the age of seventy-five, he would have asked it; while he, trusting to that claim of literary reputation of which he was not unconscious, left it to his patrons to bestow upon him what was its due reward. A voluntary offer of such a pre-

ferment, would, in his opinion, have been the most honourable, both for those who were to bestow, and for him who was to receive it.

Had Dr. Blair employed those means, by which such appointments are usually obtained, there is little reason to believe, that he would have failed in his object. His friends were both powerful and numerous. Lord Melville's influence with the rulers of the city, which he then represented in Parliament, would have given immediate effect to the slightest request from him. Of his Lordship's partiality, however, the Doctor had no desire to avail himself. Knowing and approving his Lordship's general unwillingness to interfere in the election of members of the University, and to cramp the choice of the electors, in a matter in which its fame is so deeply concerned, he was the more disposed to rest his success upon what should be felt as to his own pretensions.

When the appointment was given to another, it is certain, that Dr. Blair felt the oversight as injurious to himself, and that

he was more affected by it than his friends in general could have supposed. Flattered with the respect of the world, and unaccustomed to disappointments during a long life, that had been devoted to literary pursuits, he could ill brook any neglect, when that life was drawing to a close. Before the office was disposed of, he appeared rather indifferent about it; and as he was incapable of playing a part, his feelings had certainly deceived him. Between him and the patrons of the university there existed a misconception. He perhaps expected attentions to personal merit, which, when not called to judge of it, they had not been accustomed to pay; and they perhaps, though they would not have refused his request, thought it became them to wait till the request was made.

The friends of Dr. Baird, who succeeded Dr. Robertson, and who, in his early life, had been much indebted to Dr. Blair's friendship, did what most men in their situation would have done, and em-

ployed, as appeared afterwards, the only means that could have in the end succeeded. As no rival appeared publicly upon the field, they acted as if there had been no competition, and took no notice of the sense of the country that was not duly announced to them. By the moderation and good sense with which Dr. Baird has conducted the affairs of the University, his conduct has given general satisfaction. To the opinion of Dr. Blair, during the seven years that he survived this appointment, Dr. Baird paid a marked attention; and by a behaviour that was at once dignified and unassuming, he regained the confidence and the attachment of the amiable old man.

As the long life of Dr. Blair was spent in the unremitting pursuit of laudable studies, and in the faithful discharge of his clerical functions; so during the evening of it, he enjoyed a serenity of mind with which few were ever blessed. While his own reflections could suggest nothing that was disagreeable, the world was presenting

to him constant marks of its respect. Even in old age, he shewed a gaiety of disposition which seldom appears in others in the early stages of life. While he made trifling objects give place to important ones, from the former he could at times derive entertainment. He was happily free from that disgusting austerity of manner, which is never known to unbend. He could occasionally take part in the playfulness of those, into whose minds his elevated conceptions could find no admission; and no gloomy or peevish impression ever disturbed the tranquillity of his own. Though the love of fame, which was his ruling passion, was ardent, yet it was fully gratified; and, the place he held in the republic of letters, was the fruit of that patient industry, by which he ripened the talents with which nature had blessed him.

In April 1748, he married his cousin Miss Katharine Bannatyne, daughter of the Reverend James Bannatyne, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. From his connec-



tion with her, which lasted forty-seven years, he derived much domestic happiness; and upon her death, which happened five years before his own, he shewed that time had not blunted his sensibility, and that he felt deeply the weight of his misfortune. She directed his family affairs with the most prudent attention; and upon all occasions discovered a strength of understanding, that is seldom to be found in her sex. By her he had one son and one daughter. The former died in infancy. Miss Blair died at the age of twenty; and her death was deeply regretted on her own account, as well as on that of her afflicted parents. She was eminently distinguished for those accomplishments which became her age and sex; and by her proficiency in some of the fine arts, shewed clearly that she had been fortunate enough to inherit her father's taste.

In bearing the heaviest strokes that can rend the heart of a husband and a father, Dr. Blair displayed the power of that reli-

gion of which he was the faithful minister. When the rod was laid upon him, he bent under it, and felt the blow in all its severity. By no affected apathy did he challenge the admiration of fools. While the depth of his wound was visible to all who knew him, his patience and resignation were alike conspicuous. He was seen applying to himself that Christian balm, which with much success he had administered to others; and as his esteemed colleague Dr. Finlayson says of him, with much truth of sentiment, and elegance of expression; “His mind, fortified by religious habits, enabled him to persevere to the end in the active and cheerful discharge of the duties of his station; preparing for the world the blessings of elegant instruction; tendering to the mourner the lessons of divine consolation; guiding the young by his counsels; aiding the meritorious by his influence; and supporting, by his voice and by his conduct, the civil and ecclesiastical constitution of his country.”

Though his bodily constitution was by no means robust, yet by habitual temperance and by attention to health, his life was happily prolonged beyond the usual period. During the summer before his death, he was occupied in preparing the last volume of his Sermons for the press; and for this purpose, he copied the whole with his own hand. It seemed to give him much pleasure, that, at his advanced period of life, he was able to make this exertion. A few days before he died, he had no complaint; but on the 24th December, 1800, he felt a slight pain in his bowels, with which neither he nor his friends were alarmed. On the afternoon of the 26th, this pain increased, and violent symptoms began to appear; the causes of which were then unfortunately unknown, both to himself and to his physician. He had for a few years before laboured under an inguinal hernia. This complaint, which he was imprudently disposed to conceal, he considered as tri-

fling; and he understood, that, by taking the ordinary precautions, nothing was to be apprehended from it. Had the real cause of the disease which carried him off been known at first, and an early remedy applied, its fatal effects might have been prevented for some time. In consequence of an incarceration of the hernia, it produced a complete stoppage in his bowels; and his physician had to lament, that before his aid was called for, the strength of his patient was exhausted, and an inflammation had commenced, which it was impossible to resist. The bodily agony he underwent for some hours before his death had no effect upon his mind, which remained distinct and calm. He met his fate with the composure of a Christian, who had nothing to fear; and expired on the morning of Saturday the 27th of December, in the 83d year of his age, and the 59th of his ministry.

The death of a man who had long been acknowledged, as one of his country's bright-

est ornaments, naturally occasioned universal concern, and was regarded as a public loss. It could not, indeed, have been expected, in the course of nature, that his life would be long protacted, beyond the period which it had reached. Yet his friends could not fail to be deeply affected, when the sudden and fatal event, which snatched him from them, at last took place. The City, and the University of Edinburgh equally regretted the loss of one, whom they had, for so many years, been proud to reckon as their own, and who so eminently adorned both, by his professional talents and reputation. Even strangers, who knew the character of this valuable man only by fame, seemed to be hardly less affected by the news of his death, than his personal friends; and by none were those expressions of grief withheld, which, however unavailing in themselves, serve impressively to attest the respect of the living for the memory of the dead.



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THE Author of Dr. Blair's Life humbly flatters himself, that his work will be received with indulgence by the public. With every disposition, so far as his abilities would permit, to do justice to his subject, in complying with the request of his much honoured friend, he found himself deprived of those means of information, which most biographers have been able to command. From the conversation of a few of Dr. Blair's aged friends, who had been the companions of his youth, and from the Author's own recollection, he had to draw every anecdote which he has now related. His opportunities of being intimately acquainted with this illustrious man, were indeed uncommon. He had found, in Dr. Blair, the friend and monitor of his youth; and had, for twenty-five years, been associated with him, as one of his colleagues in the University of Edinburgh. It would be ungrateful, were the author to omit this opportu-

nity of acknowledging his high obligations to the steady and uninterrupted friendship, which he thus enjoyed, during the greatest part of his life. But on the numberless proofs of affectionate regard, with which he was honoured by his venerable friend, he would be ashamed to dwell.

The imperfect account now brought to a conclusion, is not intended as an eulogium on the distinguished character, whom it describes. The name of Dr. Blair needs no panegyrist. His literary honours are a trophy which he has erected for himself, and which time will not destroy. Posterity will justly regard him as a benefactor of the human race, and as no ordinary instrument in the hand of God, for refining the taste, improving the morality, and promoting the religion of the Christian world.

THE END.















